

**Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.**

<u>Year: 1961</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 1	"What's New?"	Ecclesiastes 1:10
January 22	"No Greater Faith"	Matthew 8:10
January 29	"What Is The Church?"	I Peter 2:10
February 5	"What Will You Do With Jesus Christ"	Matthew 27:22
February 12	"To See God's Glory"	Luke 9:32
February 19	"On Being Tempted"	Luke 4:1-2
<i>MISSING</i> March 5	"The One To Whom We Pray"	Luke 11:1-4
<i>MISSING</i> March 12	"For What To Pray"	Luke 11:1-4
<i>MISSING</i> March 19	"What God Wants Most To Give"	Luke 11:1-4
March 26	"Palm Sunday Reflections"	Matthew 21:9
<i>MISSING</i> April 2	"The Easter Faith"	Ephesians 1:19
April 16	"When Christ Becomes Real"	Luke 24:31
April 23	"To Love Is To Act"	Luke 10:33-34
April 30	"When God Becomes Contemporary"	Luke 4:21
May 14	"The Christian Home"	Marriage Prayer
May 21	"The Spirit Possessed"	Acts 2:1 & 4
June 11	"God's New Age"	Luke 6:32-36
June 18	"The Marks Of Maturity"	Luke 2:52
June 25	"God's Use Of The Incidental"	Luke 17:14
August 6	"On The Meaning Of Discipleship"	Luke 9:23
August 13		II Corinthians 5:17

1961 Continued

<u>Year: 1961</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
August 20	"A Picture Of Heaven"	Revelations 7:9
August 27	"The Extravagance of Love"	Luke 10:35
September 3	"Sermon For Labor Day"	Colossians 3:23
September 10	"The Recovery Of A Question Mark?"	Acts 4:7
September 17	"At A Young Man's Feet"	Acts 7:58
September 24	"On Being Afraid Of An Idea"	Acts 4: 1-2
October 8	"Christianity's Undeniable Evidence"	Acts 4:13
October 15	"Lessons From The Fields"	James 5:7
October 22	"When They Had Prayed"	Acts 4:31
October 29	"The Meaning Of Reformation"	John 8:30
November 5	"Christian Community"	Acts 4:32
November 12	"Two Black Sheep"	Acts 4:1-2
November 19	"The Danger In Being Christian"	Acts 5:13
November 26	"Peter's Shadow"	Acts 5:14-15
	The Key Words of Christmas A Series	Matthew
December 3	"Came"	Matthew 2:11
December 10	"See"	Matthew 2:11
December 17	"Worship"	Matthew 2:11
December 24	"Offer"	Matthew 2:11
December 24	"Journey With A Purpose"	Luke 2:15

January 1, 1961

"WHAT'S NEW?"

The sermon on this first day of 1961 bears the title, "What's New?", and as a text the 10th verse of the first chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes:

"Is there any thing whereof it may be said,  
See, this is new? it hath been already of  
old time, which was before us."

So you're a cynic, aren't you? There's nothing new. The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes is a man who was constantly talking like someone who was forever getting out on the wrong side of the bed; a man who seemed to be plagued with a perpetual case of indigestion. Cynical...that's the only word you have for him. There wasn't anything new. As far as he was concerned, name it--and I'll tell you this thing....we've already had it. He had his own way of expressing it. As an example, he said....the sun--it rises in the morning, and the sun--it sets at night.....and tomorrow, the same thing all over again!....sunrise, sunset....two weeks from now--sunrise, set. He could have said the same thing about the seasons.....springtime, summer, fall, winter....then what?---all over again--springtime, summertime, fall, winter. There isn't anything that's new. The agenda of life--Item #1: Repeat Business-----everything-----one cycle after another. I'm not so sure that I recommend Ecclesiastes as perpetual reading for you. He's about the only cynic that we have in the Bible itself.

Cynics may serve a purpose--I shan't go into that now. But at least here was one man, when he raised a question, is there anything new?...he says, No---nothing's new. And there could be some of you who might be inclined to feel that way right now about the new year. Come Tuesday morning--back to the same office, the same job, the same people, the same problems. Come the end of the first week of the new year, your teen-ager, pretty much this week in 1961 as he was the

"What's New?" (2)

first week in December---maybe not so much the last week in December....but generally speaking, it's the same thing all over again. You could be cynical, and you could face another year and say...."More of the same!"

Or you could be curious. You come to a new chapter in life, and you say, "What's new?"---as though something had been wrong with the old---as though you were sick and tired of the past. Curious..."what's new?" You're the kind of person that believes that always there is something that's going to be new. You might be willing to say...."Well, the sun rises and the suns sets---but never in the same way!" You might be willing to say that life is this daily routine, but even the daily routine has a kind of variety. And so you might not be cynical---you could be curious. Come '61, what's going to be new about it?

You have a way of looking back over the past twelve months. And now you're going to enumerate the unexpected as it occurred. If you're a business man, you might with some measure of satisfaction be pleased to recall that in 1960 you had three new accounts that you didn't have in '59. You can't quite account for them---you didn't have a salesman in that territory at that particular time....so you're delightfully pleased and surprised. This was new in 1960! What could be new for me in 1961?...the unexpected?...the pleasant surprise?

You might look back over 1960 and you'll remember that there came quite unexpectedly that promotion. Oh, I had hoped that some day it might have come to me, but in 1960 it was the reality, and I hadn't quite figured that it would have been in 1960, but it did occur. Could I hope for anything like that in 1961?

You look back over the past year.....there was the bolt out of the blue---the sudden cry in the night! Life's cruel blow. You hadn't counted on it, but it came unexpectedly. What new blow could come to me now in '61? I'm curious. I'm wondering.



### "What's New" (3)

We have a way of dividing time. You know that as far as God's concerned, there is no such thing as time. God deals with eternity. Eternity is endless.... but because we're imprisoned in this world, because we're given to using the terminology of this world, we talk in terms of time; and so we happen to come to a period and we say, all that was before this was twelve months, and we'll call that '60....and all that's going to follow from this point is twelve months, and we'll call that '61. We're curious. What will it bring? What's new?

There are some people who when they raise the question, they raise the question because they're not only curious--they're fascinated. There are some people who when they raise the question, knowing that something new could happen, they raise it because they're frightened--they're afraid of the new thing that could happen. I have been carrying around in my heart that burden that you gladly accept for someone that you've learned to love along the highway of life, to love in the Name of Jesus Christ. That friend of mine who, one night, you see, out of the clear--otherwise a perfectly clear night.....suddenly becomes widowed--four children.....within six weeks, wasn't it?--she discovers that the second boy has what could be an incurable bone condition. What's going to be new in '61? When one raises the question, he can raise it because he's afraid of what could happen, because one also remembers what has already taken place. And the providence of God---here we stand at the threshold--call it another year if you will--use the terminology of time.....and you say to yourself, what's new about it? What will be new? Call it a new chapter in time--go ahead! - call it new!....and when you do, don't shy away from it.

Every now and then, not very often, but every now and then, when I go visiting I find in a home a piece of equipment that the good man of the house got for his wife, and it might just as well have remained in the crating. She has gone on,

limping along with the old, because she isn't quite sure that she understands how to operate the new. It's different. It has too many gadgets. She's afraid. It could be that there are some people who face 1961 that way, too....because it is new, we may not know how to handle it. Now take a page from that appliance. With it, you see, came the manufacturer's instruction manual. It's all there! It is a new piece of equipment, but outlined for you are the instructions for operation. It's a wise mechanic who says, "Well, I'll pass judgment on this new piece of equipment once I learn how to operate it. Would you mind giving me the book of instructions?"

Well suppose 1961 is like a new piece of equipment. Who is the manufacturer of 1961?--do you want to look at it that way? God is the giver of 1961. It is by God's outstretched hand that you have this other chapter in time. We didn't use it this morning, but occasionally we use it.....in this ordered dignity of the Lutheran Church--after our confession of sins, the minister says to us the words of absolution:

"The Almighty and merciful God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, time for amendment of life, and the grace and comfort of his Holy Spirit."

This new chapter in time called 1961 is a gift from God. God is the designer of it....God is the Creator of it....God is the giver of it. Maybe we ought to take time to learn what He understands by it--God knows how it can best run. God knows how we can get maximum efficiency from it. As the woman who stands in front of her latest appliance--she'll do well to remember.....

"Don't overload it!" (Don't overload 1961).

"Lubricate as directed." (Oil 1961 frequently with the oil of human kindness. God's gift of time works beautifully on love!)

What's new? Are you the cynic? Are you the curious one? Maybe I can't use either of these descriptives for you, but there is a descriptive I can use--I'll call you Christian. And when a Christian raises a question, "What's new?"--how does he answer it? For a Christian, everything is always new, because he himself is new. The writer of the Book of the Ecclesiastes said, "There's nothing new under the sun2... ..the Apostle Paul, born again in Jesus Christ, in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, the 5th chapter, the 17th verse, says,

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation."

1961 may be much of the same, but you can be new. You can be different! You can look at all this monotonous routine of life that's going to be repeated in '61 with new and different eyes. You ask me what's new? I should be happy indeed if I could say, "I'm new!"

(Someone has rightly and properly said that the Christian is never more than a day old. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is being daily baptized by the Holy Spirit. As a child of God, he's being born anew each day. Are you that new in God's love? Are you that new in God's grace? Is there a freshness about His redeeming love that comes to you with each new day?

What's new? Every single day is new! And as a child of God, I should greet it with freshness and with the sincerity of God's love. '61? It could be more of the same. 61? It could be strangely different, because you and I are different.

January 22, 1961

"NO GREATER FAITH"

The sermon, based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, carries the title, "No Greater Faith." The text, the 8th chapter of Matthew, the 10th verse:

"When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

The Bible is a book of surprises. No matter how frequently you may come to its pages, it could be that you could find a surprise in one chapter after another. Surprise, indeed, that God Himself should want to come to this world! .....surprise, indeed, that He should come the way He did! Of all the surprises in the Bible--of all the surprises that came to Jesus Christ, the one that's found in the Gospel lesson for the day has a character all of its own.

To begin with, it was a surprise to Jesus Christ--to find a man such as the Roman centurian. What do you remember about him? May I recall the passage for you ever so quickly. It's the story of a man who had charge of one hundred soldiers. He was not a Jew. He was not brought up in the teachings of the established church. Ordering men around was his business.

One day he came into the very presence of Jesus Christ, and when he saw Jesus, he asked Jesus to do something. He called the attention of Jesus Christ to the fact that his servant was in great distress, and implored Jesus Christ to work a miracle in behalf of this man. Jesus indicates that He is willing to pay some attention. He goes so far as to say, "I'll come and visit you in your house." ...and the centurian says, "You don't have to do that. Right now, you speak the word, and whatever you command, it will be done."

The centurian says, "I think I understand. I'm a man under authority. I give an order, and it's obeyed. Now, Jesus, that's all you have to do!"

"No Greater Faith" - (2)

Jesus Christ....."Why, I've never seen the like of it---never in all Israel have I found a faith such as this!"

It was a great surprise to Jesus Christ to find a man whose life had already been prepared for the wonderful things that Jesus Himself would like to accomplish. So much of the time of Jesus Christ was spent in cultivating the ground--getting people ready--before Jesus Christ could do the things that needed to be done. But here is a man who needs no prior cultivation. The scene is all set---the ground had been ploughed....come on Jesus--work your miracle now!

It must have been a surprise, not only to Jesus Christ, to find a man like this, but a surprise on the part of the people who were with Jesus when He said,

"Why, I've never found any faith anywhere that can match this man's faith!"

....Now, mark you, he wasn't a Jew.....

....mark you, he didn't have the advantage of the prophets.....

....mark you, he wasn't brought up on the Ten Commandments....he was outside the established church.....

Surprise of surprises that Jesus should say to a man like that, .... "You have wonderful faith!"

Now, you wouldn't be disturbed at all if somebody came this morning and tapped you on the shoulder and said..."You're a wonderful child of God--you read your Bible---you say your prayers---you have an abiding concern for the things that matter most....."

But suppose a stranger came in here this morning and I said to him.....

"Are you a Christian?"

....."No."

"Can you recite the Ten Commandments?"

"No."

"How many times have you been in church?"

"Not very often--you see, I don't belong to the church."

But, perchance somewhere in the course of the conversation I discover that this man's soul had plumbed great depth, in what he knew in his heart to be the things of God. And suppose I said to him...."Why, there isn't anyone in this congregation--there isn't a single soul who's been here last year, three years before that--every Sunday since....why, there isn't a single person here whose faith in God can match yours!"

Surprise? Of course, you'd be surprised. Not only surprised, but strangely shocked and disturbed. The Bible is a book of surprises, and this is not the least among the surprises. To the centurian Jesus said, "I have not found a faith that can match yours."

Let the questions come quickly.....

Question number one: How could this be? How could a man like the centurian have such a wonderful faith? Well, what were its earmarks? They are really quite obvious. First of all, when the centurian finds himself in the presence of Jesus Christ, he seizes the opportunity to have some kind of a relationship with Jesus Christ. He doesn't ignore Jesus. He doesn't say..."Jesus Christ is not interested in what's on my mind.".....he doesn't say,...."I can't afford to ask Him to pay attention to me and my problem."

( To begin with, the centurian honestly believed that what was important to him was important to God. The lamentable thing about our day is, not that people have not come within hearing distance of Jesus Christ----more people have come within hearing distance of Jesus Christ than at any other time in the history of man, thanks to the great media of communication in one form or another.....  
.....but the lamentable thing is this: that for a great many people, they feel that there's no relevance whatsoever---Jesus Christ can belong to His world, and I'll go on in my own little way. Not so the centurian. He made bold to have conversation with Jesus Christ.

The second thing that you have to notice about this man is this: that when he came to talk with Jesus Christ and when he wanted to get the attention of Jesus Christ, he didn't talk about himself. Moment of moments had come!...and he didn't say...."Jesus Christ, I want you to work a miracle for me....."

He didn't say...."Jesus Christ, of all the things that are on your mind right now, put them aside, and think only of me....."

This is a great moment, now....when the centurian comes to Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is paying him attention.....and says....

"Jesus Christ, I don't want to talk to you about myself. I want to talk to you about somebody else...it's my slave, Master. He's in great distress."

Ah, contrast that with your faith and with mine! Ushered into the presence of God, and we monopolize the conversation about ourselves....it's my problem---all wrapped up with my name on it--no matter how you look at it. Put an X-ray upon your own prayers sometimes, when you're talking about God, and see how often you, yourself, bob back and forth upon the horizon.

Not so the centurian. Never so much as to say a word about himself, as far as a need is concerned. "It's my servant, Master--I'm asking you to do something for him." .....This is the earmark of a great faith--to find yourself alone in the presence of God, and to ask God to pay no attention to you, but to ask God about somebody else!

Well, that's all the more wonderful, when you appreciate a little bit about ancient history. Historians tell us that in this period of time, a servant was equal to a slave, and was the lowest in all the low in the social scale. Historians tell us that the master of a slave could do anything he wished with his slave.....he could feed him---he could starve him.....

.....he could kill him---he could guarantee him life.....

A slave was about as insignificant as any human being could ever become. And here

is a man who comes to God and has a great concern for a human being. The centurian saw a servant, not as a slave, but as a human being. The centurian had allowed the scales of prejudice to fall from his own eyes. They were not on the same social level---they were not in the same economic level---they were not in the same religious bracket. No matter how you look at it, this relationship between the centurian and the servant, worlds apart---but to the everlasting credit of the centurian, he saw him as a human being. Jesus said, "Why, I've never seen anything like this."

One of the closest things I've seen to it in my day is to be found in the medical profession. The doctor who takes the Oath of Hippocrates is in duty bound, from that moment on, if not before, to minister to any man who's in need, regardless of race, creed or color, ability to pay....as long as someone is in need, he's to be recognized as a person in need. Jesus Christ sings the praise of a man who saw another man as a human being.

( Beloved, whenever you come to God, you may rest assured that this God who is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God who is all wrapped up with people. And if you want Him to pay attention to you, you'd first better be the kind of person who knows what it is to pay attention to your brother who's in need.

"My friend and I have built a wall  
between us, thick and wide;  
The stones of it are high with scorn  
And plastered thick with pride.  
Oh, we talk across those stubborn stones  
So arrogantly tall;  
Only we cannot touch our hands,  
Since we have built the wall."

You can't touch the hand of God and lose your grip on your brother's hand at the same time. You can't expect God to pay attention to you when you ignore any other human being.) Jesus said, "Why, I've never seen a faith like it--never!" ....and immediately his servant was healed.



"No Greater Faith" - (6)

You want to lay the gound-work for a miracle?... (this could be heresy that I tell you now, in some quarters)....you want to lay the ground-work for a miracle? Well, don't first look at God. Look round about you---at your brother to the right, and to the left---and with what you have, where you are---give some concern for him.....and then you might be in for the surprise of your life!--at the way God will look at you, when you turn your face to Him at the first.

"WHAT IS THE CHURCH?"

On this Sunday nearest the Annual Meeting, the sermon bears the title, "What Is The Church?" and the text, the 10th verse of the second chapter of the First Epistle of Peter--strange words indeed:

"Once you were no people at all, but now you are  
the people of God."

When I was a child attending church, my mind would wander--perhaps during the singing of the anthem--perhaps while the scripture was being read--and invariably, so it seemed, while the sermon was being preached. And I had a little game that I played, a very simple thing it was, but it occupied my mind.:

"Here is the church  
Here is the steeple,  
Open the door--  
Here are the people."

I suppose a man never loses the imagery of his childhood. This can be both good and ill at the same time. And it could well be that for most of us, whenever we think of the church, the imagery fashioned in the days of our childhood remains, and all that I am about to share with you clings tenaciously, one way or another, to the imagery in a child's mind.

What is the church? Three different answers I propose--each of these from the child's imagery....each answer in its own right, correct....each answer, standing by itself, inadequate.

What is the church? Here is the church...and when that child's mind of mine formed its fingers and its hands in this fashion, I always saw the picture of Bethany Lutheran Church in Montoursville---this was the only church that I knew. And for me the church was always a building. I began at that point.

What is the church? A church is a place...a place to which we went. It was made out of brick, mortar, stained glass. And to this day, you mention the

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word, church, and at one moment or another, there will loom upon the horizon of my thought the church of my childhood, and it's always a place. There are children in our Sunday School who, when you say to them, "What is the church?"--- "Where is the church?".....invariably they think of this modified English Gothic structure, Colesville Road and Highland Drive---this, to them, is Saint Luke Church, and properly so, for the church is a place.

But I remember also that I quickly said..."This is the church, and here is the steeple." Ah, this must be said at once--the church isn't simply a place.... it's a particular place. It has a character, and a distinction all of its own. There is no other place to which you will go in the course of the week that has the basic character of the very place in which you are right now. And this by deliberate design! These very walls, these very windows, the arrangements of these pieces of furniture that you see here in the chancel, the centrality of the cross.....all designed to make this a particular place.

And in days gone by, that's one reason why they had the tower--that's one reason why they had the steeple....so that the passer-by could easily note the fact that here was a building, a place, which was a particular place; and the spire, the steeple, the tower--how glad I am, personally, that we have the tower that we have--only a token, to be sure, but still a token, of the tower that's over the entrance to Saint Luke Church. "Here is the church,"...but it has a steeple, and this steeple, this tower, makes it as a symbol, a distinctive place. And when you come to church, your mind and your thoughts are cast heavenward. This is a house, but it's God's House. It's a particular place.

I can't begin to tell you how heart-warming it is to see these children of yours, who when they even come to the crossing, either at the front or at the rear of the nave, pass by, when no service is in progress, and they go almost on

### "What Is The Church" (3)

tiptoe. It's a salutary thing to see a teenager enter into the quiet beauty of the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, and whisper. Oh, occasionally, when we have "Big Thursday"--that's what we call our Thursday Afternoon Program, when 140-150 precious teenagers come for three and one-half hours---it's part of the responsibility of those who staff that, now, to remind the teenager who's in the hall on a Thursday afternoon when he's eager to get from one place to another, or when he wants to greet his friend that he hasn't seen since Sunday, and there's more than the ordinary measure of enthusiasm.....we are in duty bound to remind them that even though it's Thursday, it's still God's House; and it's a rewarding thing to see how they catch on at once.

Yes, 'this is the church, and here is the steeple'. The church is a place, but more than that, it's a particular place. That's why some people, and I say this advisedly, say a contemporary style church leaves them cold--it doesn't engender intimacy in the worship experience...or they may also add this---it doesn't compel them to kneel---it lacks the sense of awe and majesty. This could be true for some, rigidly severe and austere. A church should be a particular place, that when a man comes to it, he instinctively wants to kneel, or to whisper. And this too, in this highly secular age of ours, serves a useful purpose.

"Here is the church...here is the steeple...you open the doors, and here are the people." What is the church?.....

.....a place.....

.....a particular place.....

.....a place with people.....

...you can't have a church without people. And sometimes we progress in our thinking where when we do think about the church, we immediately think of a group of people. And to this day, of course, when I think of my home church, I think of

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that venerable pastor who confirmed me, baptized me.....

.....I can't think of a church without thinking of people....Harrison App,  
cashier of the bank, who stood up in a Wednesday night prayer meet-  
ing and made me feel as though God were standing right alongside of  
him.....

.....I can't think of that church without thinking of Chrissie Wayr, the  
Sunday School teacher, who made an indelible mark upon the fabric  
of my heart.....

What is the church? People!.....

Five years ago when I walked this sacred aisle for the first time on the  
last Sunday in January, I knew very well that while you were strangers to me,  
practically every one of you, I did not allow myself to be a stranger in this  
place....because I had come among people, a particular kind of people, not stran-  
gers to God....therefore, I would not allow you to be a stranger to me. Could it  
not be that you accepted me into your hearts in the very same way? --- not as a  
stranger, but as a fellow-believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the church? People! Just like the place is a particular place,  
so the people are a particular kind of people. You are not just folks picked at  
random across the surface of the earth. You are a particular people. The Greek  
word for church itself, ecclesia, means 'called out'....'called away from'.....  
...called to a particular place, for a particular purpose, having made commitment  
to a person---the Person of Jesus Christ. A particular people, and you make your  
stamp upon Saint Luke Church in a particular way.

While a young man, immature as any young man going out from seminary is, it  
disturbed me when, ever so often, they referred to the parish which was my first  
parish, as my predecessor's parish. He had been there for almost fifty years...  
..and the stamp of his character was implanted throughout the parish in every  
way. I have long since gotten rid of the notion of discomfort; when even to this  
day, when I go back, the church is referred to as Dr. Bannon's church. There

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isn't anything particularly wrong with that. For he was a man of God, completely dedicated, whose life, whose personality, permeated all that took place in that parish. To this day, occasionally, in the Maryland Synod, when I meet some fellow pastor....."Ah, yes, you're at Saint Luke--Dr. Sorrick's church"....they remember, you see, his ministry here, brief as it was; but they remember how these walls went up and how he dreamed for this place...and died ere it was completed. Interesting, isn't it? He never stood before this altar--this altar for which he did so much dreaming for those of us who would come after him.....and yet, with affection, there are those who refer to this church as 'his' church.....a particular kind of person who ministered here.

May I ask you this question.....could there be any chance of people, when they think of Saint Luke Church, referring to it as 'your' church? One day, not long after I was here, I was going out the red doors, and a youngster, leaning out the car window, almost dangerously so, with jubilation in his voice, says, "Hey, Daddy---there's my church."

When I was a youngster in Sunday School, some well-meaning Sunday School superintendent had placarded the walls with well-meaning signs. Some were quite inane, but he meant well, just the same. I still remember the one, and you perhaps have seen it too.....

"What Kind of a Church Would This Church Be  
If Every Member Were Just Like Me?".....

When people refer to Saint Luke Church, do they get your image imposed upon it? .....and what basic nature and character of this congregation exists because of your image?

I told you each of these answers was correct. The church is a place, and it's a particular place.....and the church is people, and particular people. But none of these answers is adequate on its own. The church is God's House and

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the emphasis must always be on God.....

.....the church is God's people, and the emphasis must always be on God.  
We belong to Him.....We are His.....

What is the church? It's the projection of God into a community, through  
you!.....

.....it's the extension of the influence of Jesus Christ, through you.....

This is the church.....YOU.....yet, -- not you.....

... GOD.....through you.

(On the occasion of Pastor Shaheen's fifth anniversary at Saint Luke Church)

"WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH JESUS CHRIST?"

The sermon on this day bears the title, "What Will You Do With Jesus Christ," and the text, the 22nd verse of the 27th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"And Pilate said unto them, What then shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?"

It could be that there's one chance in five hundred that you recognize the title as the title of the sermon which I preached to you the first Sunday that I came to Saint Luke. And chances are that you'll recognize the text as being the same text as was used for that sermon five years ago, the last Sunday in January. But from that point onward, all similarity ceases. The text is the same, the title of the sermon is the same....but the sermon itself is different.

( If you should be an sentimentalist as I am on occasion, trying to go back and re-live the meaning of occasions and events, marking in my own way the significance of an anniversary, you'll understand, I think, why this text holds me, not only on this anniversary Sunday, but constantly holds me as I serve as your Pastor...the longer I am here, the more grateful I am that that's the text that laid hold upon me when I ventured to come to this pulpit for the first time. For I would warn you, that as long as God allows me to be your Pastor, this is the question of questions that I shall be in duty bound to thrust in front of you, no matter what phase of activity or endeavor it may be---by the grace of God, this question: What will you do with Jesus Christ?....How does this phase of our program come into our loyalty to Jesus Christ? I am haunted by the text. I cannot have done with it. )

When I think of this text today, and in preparation for this sermon, I am exalting the preposition in the text. What will you do with Jesus Christ. Martin Luther once said that the heart of all true religion lies in the use of personal



"What Will You Do With Jesus Christ?" (2)

pronouns. (I would take leave to tell you this morning that there can be true meaning in an insignificant preposition. Someone has classified, saying that there are thirty-six different prepositions that have varying degrees of importance. In this text now, the word that ought to receive our attention this morning....what will you do with Jesus Christ?)

Did it ever occur to you, the prepositions that Pontius Pilate might have used?---the prepositions that we sometimes think that he did use? Pontius Pilate might have said.....

.... "What, now, will I do to Jesus Christ?....there He stands....He's in our midst. Tell me, what do you want me to do to him?"....

When we read the words of the text, wittingly or unwittingly, that's the way we sometimes interpret it--as though Pontius Pilate is inviting us to a kind of reaction...."How will you react toward Jesus?" Well, if you want to use that preposition for the moment, you know the stock answers, don't you?

You react toward Jesus Christ--you react to Him, in one of three ways:

You either act with acceptance.....Yes Jesus, we have seen you!.....

.....yes, Jesus, you make a claim upon our lives--we accept you as Lord and Saviour!...and we will publicly declare it!.....

That's the way some people react to Jesus.

Some people react to Jesus in just the opposite way.....

.....Jesus, there's something about you that disturbs this world of ours, and we shan't have it disturbed!.....

.....Jesus, there's something about you that we do not like.....

.....Jesus--we shall react toward you in this way--we shall reject you!....we shall have done with you!.....

.....we will crucify you!.....

That's the way the Pharisees talked....that's the way Judas Iscariot talked. And

"What Will You Do With Jesus Christ?" (3)

would you believe me if I were to tell you that even today there are those who follow in that tradition---when they're invited to give some kind of a reaction toward Jesus---when they're asked...."What will you do to Him?", they say --

....."Get rid of Him!".....

If you were to visit Moscow today, in all likelihood you might be able to visit what is referred to as an "Anti-God" Museum. Some of the Soviets are proud of the fact that they are pitching their tents against Jesus Christ....and in this anti-God museum they will show you relics of what they refer to as an era that has come and gone, and they refer to it as the Christian Era---a thing of the past!.....

....there's a communion chalice.....

.....there's a copy of the Bible.....

.....there's a cross.....

And to this day there are people who belong to a society whose only justification for existence is this: ... to reject Jesus Christ.

So, if you were to put the question this way....What will you do to Jesus?...

.....I shall react by acceptance.....

.....I shall react by rejection.....

John Oxenham once wrote a poem in which he says there's a high road, a low road, and an in-between road.....and most of the people drift to and fro in the in-between; and if you were to press this point with some people and say..."What is your reaction toward Jesus Christ?---if you had something to do to Him, what would it be?".....it grieves my heart, as it should grieve yours, to know what they say precisely...

....."Oh, nothing! Let Him go His way--I want to go mine.....

...He is completely irrelevant to me and to all that I am...."

Well, if you use the preposition in that sense, that's the way it might be answered...

.....What will you do to Jesus?

"What Will You Do With Jesus Christ?" (4)

Or, if you were to use the preposition....What will you do for Jesus?..Ah!  
we have the answers for that, don't we?.....

....I'll sing praise for Jesus!.....

.....I'll build churches for Jesus!.....

.....I'll plan programs for Jesus!.....

....I'll bring offerings for Jesus!.....

....and that's the note we seem to strike during the Lenten season.....

...."I gave My life for thee...what hast thou done for Me?..."

We confront people with the life, the sufferings and the death of Jesus Christ, and then say...."All this He has done for you---what will you do for Him?"....and we accent the preposition, for. This, in itself, might be good, but with all the ardor of my soul, I tell you it's not good enough, because you and I run the risk, when we talk about doing something for Jesus Christ, of asking the whole world to look at us.....We are doing this for Jesus Christ....the church of Jesus Christ becomes my church. We must be very careful, lest the halo that we slap down upon our heads so easily begins to tilt!.....for what can a man, after it's all said and done, do for Jesus?

*sublime*  
Pontius Pilate, wittingly or unwittingly, uses the ~~blind~~ preposition, because the preposition of lasting significance is this:

.....not to.....

.....not for.....

.....but, what will you do with Jesus?

I don't know what was in the mind of Pontius Pilate, but at this great distance, I can tell you what I think should have been.

When he used the preposition with, he should have allowed it to become an invitation to identification. He should have allowed it to become an invitation to parti-

cipation--an invitation to share in the work of Jesus Christ. Ah, Pontius Pilate, make your words mean what they ought to mean!...."What will you do with Jesus?"....  
....I'll tell you what you could have done with Jesus, Pontius Pilate.....

.....you could have gone from that place, high and almighty, where  
you sat, and you could have gone over to Jesus Christ, and you

could have stood with Him!---Ahi that's it, Pontius Pilate!.....

....you ask the question..."What will you do with Jesus" -- you could have stood  
with Jesus, Pontius Pilate!

( Every now and then I play an interesting game....what Bible character would I like most to have been? And I find myself somewhat startled, when I come back, ever so often, to Simon the Cyrenian. Of all the Bible characters in the life of our Lord, if I could have chosen one, at least for this moment, I think I would have liked to have been Simon of Cyrene....who, seeing Jesus Christ traveling the Via Dolorosa with the heavy burden of the cross upon His shoulders, came from where he was, got in step with Jesus---walked with Jesus--carried the cross with Jesus. This is the abiding--this is the eternal invitation of the Christian church to her people....."What will you do with Jesus?".....

.....an invitation to participate.....

.....an invitation to identify.....

For Jesus is always the Great Doer of Things---He is forever busy in the things of God. Removed from this world in the physical sense, Jesus Christ is still alive, and He's walking everywhere and is always doing something in God's name for someone or for something. What will you do with Jesus?---Who is forever busy with the things of God? This is symbolic---this is parabolic, what He said.....

...."Why, didn't you know?---I must be busy....I must be about My  
Father's business!....."

And even though He has left this earthly sphere in the physical sense, His spirit

remains....He is still actively engaged in the things of God, and His invitation remains....."What will you do with me?".....

...."What will you do with me?".....

...."What will you do with me?".....

I like to think, my friends, that when that Catholic priest and when that Methodist preacher walked down the street with two youngsters, defying an angry mob, they were walking with Jesus Christ. For He, too, has a God-given concern for the God-given right of every single human being. Name any area of the world's misery-- --Jesus Christ is already there, and His invitation to us is...."Come, work with Me-- ....work with Me!

Now, if you are to work with Jesus Christ, you'll have to work His way. He doesn't bend Himself to our standard. This is part of the glory of it all---when you begin to work with Jesus Christ, you accept His standard for achievement. And when you begin to work with Jesus Christ, you have the abiding satisfaction that your cause is never lost. The responsibility of the Christian church is to give flesh and blood to the spirit of Jesus Christ---to make His presence felt in this world.

It's that neighbor of ours who said one time, as she called to her child in bed....."Now, go to sleep---everything's all right---God is watching over you.".....

And she said, ever so innocently...."But I don't feel Him kissing me good-night, and putting the covers around my neck!".....God does watch over us, to be sure, but God needs you to tuck those covers around a child's neck....God needs you to give flesh and blood to his spirit.

Quite recently, I have developed an interest in short stories of Russian writers. I want to share one with you right now.

It's the story of an old man who is relating something out of his life and his experience to his grandchild. He had been the steward, the custodian, for a great estate; and when the terrible Russian winters came, the lord and master went

to more pleasant regions; and he asked this man to be in complete custody of his estate. And the old man is relating, now, some of the things that happened to him while he took care of the estate.

And he said, "My child, one night, in the stillness of the night, I heard two men coming."

And the child said, "Grandpa, were they robbers?--were they bad men?--were they thieves?"

And he said, "Listen, my child, and I will tell you. When I heard them, I went out--I surprised them....and when I surprised them, one of the men reached for an axe, and he would have killed me....but I was equal for the occasion--I was not unarmed--I had my rifle. And when they saw my rifle, they stopped where they were.

"And then, as I kept my rifle on each of them in turn, I said to one of them, 'Go into the nearby woods and get the sturdiest twig or branch that you can find and bring it back'....and when he came back, my child, I ordered him to beat his companion, and he thrashed him as I ordered him to do, without mercy....

"And then, with whatever strength was left, or with whatever strength he was able to regain, the beaten one gave the same kind of treatment to his companion...

"And then, a pitiable sight to behold....one of them cried...'It's bread we want!...it's bread!'.....and I said to them, 'If it's bread you want, why didn't you ask me?--why didn't you come and knock at my door?'

"And then, my child, he said to me, 'We thought it would be of no use. We had met only disappointment after disappointment. We had come to believe that no one in the world was gracious any more---no one was kind. We did not believe it would do any good to ask. We gave ourselves only to the act of thievery.'

"And then, my child, I took them into the house. They stayed with me the winter through. The one helped around the house--brought in the fire-wood; the

other was sick, but I nursed him to health. And then when spring came, they disappeared."

The child says, "And, Grandpa, where do you suppose they went?--and, Grandpa, why did you do what you did?"

And he said, "My child, I shall answer only one question at a time.

"Where they went, I do not know, but with all my heart I believe they went with a renewed faith in mankind, that somewhere there were people who could act with love and mercy.

"Why did I do what I did? My child, I was led to believe that, hovering over them, robbers as they were, was something of the spirit of Jesus Christ."

Kind one, in this sin-stained world, someone ought to treat people like Jesus Christ....this is the job of the Christian church--to be to people as Jesus Christ.

So the preposition, with, becomes the invitation to participate...an invitation to identify.....What will you do with Jesus Christ? )

Pilate could have gone over and stood alongside of Him and walked with Him.

Pilate missed his chance.....

\* \* \*

"TO SEE GOD'S GLORY"

The sermon for the day bears the title, "Too See God's Glory" and the text is the 32nd verse of the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him."

Whether you are willing to admit it or not, it can still be said that we have with us a generation for whom God has lost His halo. There are people living in our day who, if they have any respect or reverence at all for God, it's something at long range. They have never known what it is to fall upon their knees and to be awe-struck by God.

(Russell Kirk, writing an article for the current issue of FORTUNE magazine, under the title, "Can Protestantism Continue To Influence Or Hold Its Place In America?" takes the Protestant churches to task for failure to make a greater impact upon the American scene. One thing that's implied in his article is this: that the city of Nashville in Tennessee as an example, could be classified as the most Protestant area in the United States---more Protestant churches, perhaps, than any other church, and a higher percentage of Protestants going to church in that city.....in contrast with that he cites Rome, which could be the Roman Catholic capital for the world. Nashville has twice as many churches---Rome has twelve times as many people. And he goes on to say that the crime rate in Nashville is among, I think, if I remember correctly, the first fifteen cities in the United States.

As he goes on to lament in his article, he gives us to understand that we're raising a generation of people who no longer hold God in fear, and he says that Protestants in particular have a way of tolerating God. He quotes a coed from a college campus.....I hesitate to give you her exact words--they were a jolt to my soul, and I question whether or not I should say them even here from this pulpit...



"To See God's Glory" (2)

....but when she was interrogated, and he interrogated a number of people as he went throughout the United States and Canada.....he asked her about her belief in God, and this Protestant coed said....."Oh, I believe in God, but I'm not nuts about him....."

Stunned into silence as you and I may be by this comment by one so crudely honest and unabashed, we may have to admit that while there are thousands upon thousands--yes, even millions--who wouldn't talk that way, there are millions in the United States for whom God is nothing more than a general idea.....

....a vague notion.....

.....a kind of deity, incorporated---with whom we have dealings only at long range.....we have no vital first-hand relationship....

.....there is a God--but I've never seen him face to face.....

.....there is a God--but I've had no personal encounter with him....)

Now, if you've never seen Him face to face, and if you've never had any personal encounter with Him, how can you get to know Him?.....

If you've never had the kind of encounter with God, to see God as He is, you don't know what it is to be held in awe by God and to fear Him.....

If you can't fear Him, then you've never seen the halo around His head---ours could be a generation for whom God seems to have lost His halo.

But you ask the question, and well you should.....

Hold on, preacher-----

....is it possible for a person to see God face to face?

....can a human being have an encounter with God directly?

Be fair with us, now---

...are you talking about something that's possible?---

maybe you're dealing in the realm of the impossible.

How can a human being, frail, sinful, weak, mortal---how can he

see God?

### "To See God's Glory" (3)

....and especially if God is a spirit? Is it possible?.....

- The answer is -- yes. And again it's the Bible that offers us the proof. The Bible gives us the assurance that ever so often in history there were people who had a personal encounter with God and who, when they saw Him and knew this rare moment of experience, they were stunned into silence. And the only thing they could do, once it had happened to them, was to put their finger to their lips and reverently whisper the name of God---they had nothing else to say for it. It does happen, and the Bible names character after character listed in the category of those who have seen the glory of God!

Now I must warn you, it doesn't happen the same way to every person. God has a variety of roads into your soul--into any man's soul....

....for distinguished scholars, who came from the Far East---they beheld the glory of God at the end of a wandering star in a small town.....

....for shepherds who watched their sheep in the stillness of the night--they experienced the glory of God in a song that pierced the darkness.....

....for an aged man, standing within a temple---he saw the glory of God in the face of an eight-day old baby.....

....a woman, with a past, with an unsavory reputation--had an encounter with God face to face, as she talked with a Stranger by a way-side well in Samaria.....

....a demon-possessed woman--Mary, the Magdalene--had an experience with God when she heard the pronunciation of her name in the cool of a Resurrection Garden.....

....Peter, James and John--the three disciples who loom so largely in the scriptural account which serves as a basis for this sermon--were men who went with Jesus to a mountain....when they were there, after a while, they could say--"We saw no man except Jesus only"....

It can happen.....it does happen!

"To See God's Glory" (4)

But you raise the question now.....

....who are they to whom this thing happens?

...if it's a rare moment, who are the people who experience this rare moment?

....does God show favoritism?....does God, when He gives out talent and skill, give this person a particular sensitivity of spirit, and this person a particular sensitivity of spirit, and in the meantime, passes over all the rest of us?

.....Joan of Arc was taken to task by the Dauphin in Bernard Shaw's play which bears the same name, and the Dauphin makes fun of her and he says, "You're always talking about voices---you're always talking about hearing God speak to you---why doesn't God speak to me?"

And she gave him the only perfect answer that could be given to him. She said, "You could hear God speak to you, if you'd only be quiet enough." .....Wordsworth raises the question, "Does God have a few to whom he whispers in the ear?"

....does God show favoritism?

....there were twelve disciples, weren't there? - - by the way, even the number twelve indicates a kind of limitation. And yet, out of that whole twelve, He only took a quarter of them--three of them-- Peter, James and John....when this rare thing was going to take place in their lives.

Who are they who are privileged to see God's glory? Are they only the especially endowed--the particularly, the peculiarly spiritually sensitive?

The glory of glories is this: when God made man--God gave him a soul, and it's the soul that has made man in the image of God....a likeness unto God. Like can call unto like. The spirit of God in man can respond to God's spirit. It may appear to

"To See God's Glory" (5)

us that there were only the select and the chosen ones. But every single person possessing a soul has a quality and a capacity by which God's glory can be perceived! Someone has also said...."Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God, but only the man who sees takes off his shoes and worships; the rest stand around and pluck blackberries."

God's glory can be seen....and it's seen by those who're spiritually sensitive.....

...but point three in the sermon now....

being spiritually sensitive, a man must keep himself alert. The Scripture puts it in this way..."But when they were awake"...or, as the Revised Standard Version puts it..."They kept themselves awake".....now that verb "kept" means deliberate intent. They were able to see God because they exercised an effort. Had they fallen asleep, they would not have seen the glory of God which was there in Jesus Christ. The glory of God is made known to us, but it doesn't happen automatically, and it never happens casually. The disciple band experienced the glory of God because they kept themselves awake.

I must tell you now as I implied earlier.....God doesn't take the same road into every man's souls. And by the same token, this doesn't happen at the same place. As the way may be different, so the place may be different. Where is the locale that God might choose for you to reveal His glory?

I think Martin Niemoller, that strong, dynamic Lutheran pastor, who had that wonderful parish outside of Berlin, who could have gone on comfortably, in a very comfortable fashion, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and been undisturbed and untouched by Hitler, had he decided to do that. But because he had to preach the Gospel as he knew it, Hitler put his finger upon him, and for eight and one-half years he was the personal prisoner of Adolph Hitler.

While Martin Niemoller might always have known something of the glory of God, ....I heard him on his first visit to the United States after his release from impris-

"To See God's Glory" (6)

sonment, and if ever I felt I had met a man who had seen Jesus Christ face to face, I felt that was true for this man.....and he told us, how in his little prison cell, the truth of truths that came home to him was that Jesus Christ was right there. Oh, he could hear them open the gates--he could hear the prisoners exercising in the block below---he knew what happened, day by day, and how they disappeared.....

Somebody said to him...."What was the truth of God that was made real to you while you were a personal prisoner?"

And he said quickly and without hesitation....."Jesus Christ is alive!...and

I felt His Presence in my cell block, and in my own tiny cell!"

That's how it happened to him.....

....It could be at a moment of great joy in your life, when you'll see God face to face.....

....it could be in a moment of great despair---sorrow---tragedy---

....it could be when something unusually good happens to someone you love.....

....it could be in the face of frustration--and fear ... I don't know!

This I do.....

...that God's glory can be seen, but when it happens, a man can never again be the same.

\* \* \* \*

"ON BEING TEMPTED"

The sermon on this first Sunday in Lent bears the title, "On Being Tempted." It is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day and the text is from Luke's account of the temptation experience, the first and second verses of the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned  
from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the  
wilderness,  
Being forty days tempted of the devil.

The text is a puzzlement--it just doesn't fit into our ordinary notion of things concerning Jesus or life itself as we've experienced it.

Now there are some passages in scripture that we begin to understand immediately, or we think we do.....

..."The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want".....

...."God is our refuge and strength, a very present help  
in trouble".....

...."This is my commandment, that ye love one another"....

...these words, a text like these, have an appeal to us, and immediately we respond to them. But there's something about this text, upon close examination, that we may not particularly like, for the simple reason--it's quite alien to our ordinary way of thinking.

As an example...do you mean to tell me that Jesus Christ was tempted? When I use that word 'tempt' in plain ordinary English, it implies seduction -- being led persuasively into evil. When I think of tempt--I've been told that there's a group of people who maintain that when we succumb to temptation, it's because there's evil inside of me that's responding ever so easily to evil outside

## "On Being Tempted" (2)

of me. Jesus being tempted? Am I to understand that there's something evil in the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ by which He could respond to the evil that Satan wanted to make so attractive to Him? The text is a puzzling thing.

And then when I read that Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, was tempted by the devil....are strong people tempted? Don't we ordinarily talk about a "weak sister" and immediately we say..."She's so easily tempted! Why, she doesn't know how to say 'no'." "You know me!" she says, "Don't tempt me!" Temptation belongs to the weak-willed. If Jesus was full of God, and that's another way you can translate this text 'full of the Holy Ghost'----do you mean to tell me that the devil would have Him on his calling list?

What do you make of a text like this now? It really is difficult to understand, when you start probing. Jesus, the sinless one, being subject to temptation? And if that weren't enough, why the Bible spells it very clearly---He was deliberately led by God into this situation...."led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil".....you may wish these words to read otherwise, and you may prefer to have them mean something other than what they do, but the text is there.

Does God lead us into temptation? Does God push you toward the devil?.... ..and then when He's done it, does He say, "Now you stay there by yourself, and you see it through!" ? Jesus was tempted by the devil...in the wilderness...forty days ....and led by the Spirit at that!

Well, the text happens to mean exactly what it says. By the way, how did we get this text anyway? It must have been because Jesus told it. Temptation is always a personal matter. It's always something that takes place between the devil and me....and I have had my own private arena where it takes place---and I don't sell tickets, either. It's a secret field, hidden from the view of other people. So it was for our Lord. The marvel is this, and great comfort, too....Jesus Himself retraced this story of the temptation experience; and He might have told it to His

### "On Being Tempted" (3)

disciple band as He neared the end of His ministry, because He wanted them to benefit from His experience.

Now the key word in this whole situation is the word 'tempt'. What do you and I understand by that word 'tempt'? The English lets us down, if by temptation we only understand being seduced into evil....being attracted persuasively by evil to adhere to evil. The better word, my friend, for temptation is test. This is the testing experience in the life of Jesus Christ. And when you and I experience temptation, call it a test.

If you travel in the Near East, you might see, on occasion, an old man take a piece of skin in his hand, from the hide of an animal, of course....he has some purpose in mind, some use, to which he will put it....but before he puts it to its desired use, chances are he may take that skin into his hand, and with the strength of his own fingers he will pull and stretch....because he wants to tear it?--because he wants to destroy it before he uses it? No, of course not. He stretches and pulls because he wants to test it--to see before it is put to its use how strong it really is--to ascertain its power to withstand the forces that will be playing against it. The word for the Arab who does that with this piece of skin in his hand is that he is 'tempting'...he is testing. And isn't there such an expression as the "tempering" of steel? Now it begins to make sense, doesn't it? To be tempted is to be tested. And God Himself is interested in seeing that the test takes place.

And just before this temptation experience occurred, Jesus had been declared God's Beloved Son--the baptism power of God had been bestowed upon Him.....Jesus was now fully aware of all the meaning of the God-head. And being full of the Holy Ghost, God says..."Now--take the test. There's a world of ministry awaiting to be performed, but before you begin it, the testing experience has to take place." And in the mountain, by Himself, Jesus is tempted. A natural thing, my friend.



"On Being Tempted" (4)

The other night we tarried in Bieber Hall and the youngsters who are interested in going to the choir camp at Mar-Lu-Ridge this summer, that very worthy endeavor of Saint Luke Church, saw some of the pictures from last year's camping experience; and some of the youngsters recalled the ferris wheel, where on a day or two we went for amusement to Braddock Heights....and there, in full color, some of our own eager-beaver teen-agers on the ferris wheel.....

....do you think for a single minute that those of us in charge of that group would have allowed any one of our teen-agers to take a ride in the ferris wheel if we had not first been assured that that ferris wheel had been properly tested?.....

.....do you think the United States government would allow any craft to fly in the air that had not first undergone serious tests?....

.....would you want to ride on an elevator that was not periodically examined and tested?.....

.....would you want to follow a leader who had not been tested? -- and where the stamp of all that's decent and honorable had been placed upon him?.....

In the sight of God, testing was the required experience for all who would follow Jesus Christ. That leads us, then, to gather the comfort that rightfully belongs to us from this text.

In the first place, we gather a measure of comfort in the realization that Jesus himself was tested. And if Jesus himself had to undergo so great a test, who do I think I am, that I can escape temptation? And that leads me to say this to you.....if you don't have a daily bout with the devil, or an occasional encounter with the devil, then I'm not so sure that you've ever really been confronted by God. The devil is really interested only in those people that God himself has first claimed. Jesus Christ had been claimed by God, and the devil knew it, so Jesus Christ

"On Being Tempted" (5)

was on the devil's calling list. Temptation should be recognized as routine in the life of the Christian. That's the first observation that comes to us.....

....Jesus was tempted....

....the follower of Jesus Christ will be tempted too, and put to the test.

The second thing that you and I have to notice from this is the simple observation that temptation is always a personal matter.

....you can't send aircraft #2 to take the place of aircraft #1 at testing time, and then mark off aircraft #2 for aircraft #1.....

.....you can't test the elevator at the south end of the building and say that this meets the test, now, for the elevator in the north end.....each has to be tested in turn.

And just as you and I have our own personal encounter with Jesus Christ, even so you and I have our own personal encounter with the devil.....

And just as you and I do not have our personal encounter with Jesus Christ in the same way, so you and I do not have the same ~~xxxxxxxx~~ kind of temptation experiences.....

But this I will say....the devil will come to you, always in the area of the things that matter most--in the things that you count most precious....that will be the arena where your temptation is going to take place. And it will be tailor-made for you.

The third thing that you and I have to note is this, and it must never, never be overlooked.....Jesus Christ did not succumb to temptation...and somewhere in the Bible you can read this very, very precious passage....Jesus will not allow you and me to be tempted beyond that which we are able!

Jesus did not succumb to temptation. He gave the devil his marching orders. But what was the strategy of Jesus Christ? How could He keep the devil at a good

distance? Do you know how He did it?

....He kept His eye on His noble purposes in God.....He refused to allow the devil to take His mind away from God!

(When Hans Lilje, that remarkable Bishop of our church from Hanover, Germany, a President of the Lutheran World Federation, was confined in prison by the Nazis, he tells in his interesting book, "The Valley of the Shadow", how in his own cell, on the floor, he saw blood stains; and how day after day he heard the piercing, agonizing cries of those who were being tortured; and how, to break his spirit, they kept burning constantly in his cell the glaring light globe above him. But with discipline and deliberation he made up his mind that nothing would deter him from endeavoring to serve God and remember God's precious promises to him. So when he was tempted to become weak, to lose heart and to despair, it was the remembrance of God that kept him from succumbing to that temptation.)

Jesus kept coming back, saying.....

....."but God said".....

....."but God said".....

...."this is the purpose of God....this is what God has provided".....

.....and even when the devil began to quote scripture, Jesus kept him at a good distance by recalling for the devil the very purpose of God, beyond the printed word of scripture.

(Do you remember how I told you, one time, about old Quinton Hogg, a Londoner--who gave his life in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to minister to the underprivileged and the delinquent in the London slums? Most unattractive work. So very unpromising, too. But every now and then he'd get a convert.

And there was a boy whose life was completely transformed by the influence of Jesus Christ through Quinton Hogg. And one day, someone said to him, who knew him...."Tell me, Skipper, what keeps you on the straight and narrow? Don't you

ever become tempted to revert to type?"

And Skipper replied, "Every day that I live, there's the call of the past, and I'm tempted to be the kind of a person I once was; but," he said, "you know the thing that keeps me straight?"....and then he reached in his pocket and pulled out a torn picture of Quinton Hogg, and he said, "Every time I feel tempted to go back to the old way, I look at this man's picture, and when I think of all that he stood for and he meant to me, it doesn't seem nearly as attractive." )

For those of us who take the name of Jesus Christ, may Jesus Christ become so real to us that all that He is and all that He stands for will remain far more attractive than anything that the devil can offer.

Now when you read Luke's account of the temptation, it says, "The devil left him, but only for a season." I wish I could tell you, beloved, that once you have had your bout with the devil, you've had it, and from that moment on, you have it made. This I cannot tell you.

The devil kept coming back to Jesus. And the devil will keep coming back to you and to me. In fact, it can be said that the shadow of the devil is cast against you and me to the very gate of Paradise.

Take heart, my friend, the test is there, that you may ascertain your weakness and your strength. And when you discover your weakness, know that the only source of strength is through God's Holy Spirit. No man can ever withstand the devil by himself. But you and God can keep him at a safe distance.

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"PALM SUNDAY REFLECTIONS"

The sermon on this day bears the title, "Palm Sunday Reflections," and the text is from the Gospel for the day, the 21st chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord;"

You have to begin at the point, it was a mass movement. There was the crowd. It is that crowd that gave acclaim to Jesus Christ. And I've heard a number of different sermons, and read some, too, where preachers have made much of the fact that at least once in the life of Jesus He came into his own, and if God allowed this for no other reason, then certainly He allowed it for this reason, that when He entered Jerusalem, there was at least a moment in time when the multitude acclaimed Him king.

I never made much of that thought, however. I've never had the slightest inclination to preach a sermon with that theme in mind--that this was a moment in time when the multitude recognized Him for all that He was.

When I was a youngster in Sunday School, and Sunday School impressions have a way of lingering on, and well they should....it was my Sunday School teacher who told me as a lad....

"Well, boys and girls, don't forget that while the mob came out and cried 'Hosanna,' it was the same mob a few days later that cried 'Crucify.'" She said, "You can't trust mobs---for shame upon them," she said, "one day, 'Hosanna,' the next day, 'Crucify.' You can't trust mobs. Mobs," she went on to say, "don't know what they want."

"Palm Sunday Reflections" (2)

I have been haunted by her explanation. I'm not certain whether she rendered me a service or disservice, because I've been troubled by the thought, 'mobs don't know what they want.' Well, then, why should we allow ourselves any measure of joy at all in realizing that a mob did come out to see Jesus Christ? If you're going to take the mob to task for shouting 'Crucify,' then you must also find no joy, no satisfaction, in the thought that they did come out one day and acclaim Him as Lord. The one rules out the other, if you say mobs are fickle--mobs are unreliable--mobs don't know what they want.

Let's go back, now, to the beginning of the sermon. It was a mass movement, and they did come out and they shouted, "Hosanna." Don't you, for a single minute, tell me that mobs don't know what they want! This can be the diabolical thing about a mob. A mob knows precisely what it does want, and that's why they are as positive as they are. That's why they are as determined as they are. Mobs know what they want. Crowds do move toward their objective, and they'll hold no quarter until they get what they want. This is the frightening thing about a mob.

When I look now at this Palm Sunday so many years ago, I am constrained to say to myself--they knew what they wanted....that's why they shouted the way shouted....

....they wanted a deliverer.....

.....they wanted an national hero.....

....they wanted a leader that they could call their own....

It could be that all those people who made up that mob had been taught in their Jewish schools about something that happened in their own national history 150 years before. There was a very wicked king, so they called him, Antiochus, came down from Syria and he conquered Jerusalem. He was a great lover of all things Greek, and he said Jewish culture, Hebrew tradition, must be put aside...."I'll

"Palm Sunday Reflections" (3)

impose upon them Greek culture---they will have to worship Greek gods".....  
...so intent was he on his purpose that he did the grossest of sacrilege--he  
even sacrificed a pig upon the altar of a Jewish god. How demoralized they were.  
But the Jewish people prayed that one day the leader of their people would ap-  
pear---someone who would free them from the tyranny of Antiochus. Their prayer  
was heard, and Judas Maccabeas appeared on the scene.

Do you know for a fact that almost the very shout of praise that they  
gave to Jesus on that first Palm Sunday was practically an echo of the song and  
the shout that greeted Judas Maccabeas....."Hosanna"....."Save, Lord".....  
...."Blessed is he who comes".....! They were steeped in history---they knew  
the necessity for someone to deliver them...their national pride and their nation-  
al honor was at stake. God would have His own way of guaranteeing them someone  
on a charger!

Well the years passed....lo and behold now, out of Galilee comes this  
one, riding triumphantly! Don't we call it the Triumphal Entry? Don't we make  
much of the fact that they shouted their hosanna? They knew what they wanted.  
Crowds knew what they want. They knew what they wanted on Palm Sunday.

The days of the week passed....they watched this hoped-for leader. The  
crowd discovers that He's not measuring up to their expectation. No tanks....no  
troops....no implements for rebellion....

...why, He has even gone so far as to talk about forgiveness.....

.....He has even gone so far as to instruct His disciples that they were  
to have one rule in their lives---love. .... humility.....

.....you can't drive an occupying force out of the country by washing  
people's feet!.....

.....you can't get recruits who will take swords and staves by sitting  
around the table and drinking from a cup and eating a piece  
of bread!.....

...they became disappointed, they became disillusioned. Crowds know what they want! And when they discovered that their leader was not measuring up to their ideal--when they had another choice....they said, get rid of Him! Don't tell me crowds don't know what they want--they know exactly what they want. They knew what they wanted on Holy Thursday--Good Friday...they knew what they were saying when they shouted, "Crucify!..crucify!.....crucify!.....we'll have nothing to do with this kind of leader." This could be the diabolical thing about crowds.

Now what do you make of it, my friend? Having said all of this, do you just walk away from it now? Ah, no, you just can't do that! There are several other things that remain to be said. You and I, if we couldn't say it before, we can say it now, are living amid a generation of mass movements. This is the generation of the crowd. Your cities are teeming masses. You can't go anywhere where there isn't a crowd. Shopping centers are crowded, and if a man has a place of business that isn't crowded, he'll close up and he'll move somewhere where the crowd will come. Highways are crowded--this is the generation of the crowds....and this is the generation of the mass movement. From the Far East....out of Africa....the Middle East....any trouble spot of the world.....the significant hour usually comes when the mass is aroused, and we have our way of becoming excited from one riot after another. We shall go on being people of the crowd. This is a descriptive for our generation.

But who make up crowds? You can't indict a whole crowd. Authorities can't take into the legal courts an indictment that says...."all those present at such-and-such a time." To have an indictment--to present a case, you use names. This must always be the part of the understanding of the crowd. Crowds are made up of people. It's the projected image of the individual--it's one person multiplied



many times. This, too, is the terrible thing about the crowd.

Now when you and I come to Palm Sunday, and we engage in moments of reflection, it will have no meaning for us whatsoever if when we turn back the pages of time and we simply see a mob of people without seeing, perhaps, your image and my image in the crowd.

....would it have been my voice that would have made the  
'hosanna' louder?

....would it have been my voice that would have made  
'crucify' so acute?

This is the question that remains. Mobs know what they want. Had I been in the mob, would I have wanted what they wanted?

There is another reason why the mob reacted the way it did in the day of Jesus--why they turned from 'hosanna' to 'crucify.' They discovered that this redeemer, talking about love, involved them, because they'd have to love, and they'd have to pray. It might exact a price from them. Mobs, sometimes, have no desire to pay a price.

When I was a lad I used to go to the ~~country~~ fair. I used to get quite excited when I'd hear someone with his little platform, standing up with his spiel. How entertaining it was....a series of jokes, a series of illustrations--you were quite fascinated. But then he led into his pitch. And after his pitch he brought something out, an object that he was selling, and it had a price-tag .....and as soon as he began talking price, the crowd began to thin and the people separate. ....

The nearer Jesus Christ got to the cross, the more He talked about a price that had to be paid--the more He talked about involvement. Crowds usually are made up of spectators who have no desire to become involved - personally. Jesus

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Christ has a way of getting us all involved personally!

....and when the crowd found out that this was part of the story, they had no intention of getting involved. It was far easier to kill Him.

This is part of the Palm Sunday reflection, my friend, Read the story again. See the mob scene. But understand this.....that it has no meaning if somewhere in the mob you can't put yourself.....because mobs are made up of people.

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"WHEN CHRIST BECOMES REAL"

The sermon for today bears the title, "When Christ Becomes Real," and the text is based upon the Gospel lesson which was read in your hearing, it's the 31st verse of the 24th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And their eyes were opened and they knew him;"

The tremendous truth of the Christian religion is that Jesus Christ is alive. The sad fact remains, however, that for a large number of people who take the name of Jesus Christ, there is no abiding presence. There is for them no awareness of an ever-present Reality. The tremendous truth of the Christian religion!...and for many people day by day, there is no awareness.

Henry Drummond once wrote a book, the title for which I have forgotten, in which he depicts a very interesting scene. In his day word had gotten around that Jesus Christ was alive in Palestine--He had returned. Enterprising tour agents made the most of it. They got up all kinds of tours, offering all kinds of accommodations. And lo and behold, all roads led to Palestine.

Henry Drummond pictures people selling all that they had in order to make the pilgrimage--tapping their life's earnings in order to guarantee passage...just to be able to go in the 19th century and to look into the eyes of Jesus Christ....

....to be able to hear His voice.....

.....to catch something of the magnetic quality of His person....

.....to be able to say--I saw Him---I heard Him....I knew Him

to be alive!.....

....So Henry Drummond pictured people taking advantage of one opportunity after another to go all the way to Palestine to be in the presence of Jesus Christ.

It isn't necessary!----of course it isn't necessary! The justification for the resurrection, if it isn't anything else, it is most certainly this: that any man anywhere can be made aware of the Presence of Jesus Christ!

He is here.....now.....wherever you may be.

If this is God's tremendous truth which He has made possible for us, why is it that we don't know it? Why is it that we don't live our lives in the knowledge that He is the Eternal Pilgrim?--the Abiding Presence? Why is it that there's only one church, up until 1940, of which most of us have any knowledge at all, that would ever be as bold as this--to just have its name, "The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Abiding Presence".....let all the world take note!---we worship an ever-living Christ.

There are some people, and I weigh my words carefully, who would give practically anything if they could say, as the simple minded woman in Tennessee when the stranger, going down the road, passed her house and saw her standing on the porch of her little shack---"Who lives in there?".....

.....and her reply--"Nobody lives in here--except me and Jesus."

.....there are people that I know who would give almost anything if Jesus Christ could be as real to them as He is to that woman.

There are people who read the Scriptures, and they are brought up short, suddenly, as they read the words of the Apostle Paul who was able to say....

...."I live--yet I don't live....Jesus Christ lives in me!"

This is the tremendous truth of the Christian religion--that Jesus Christ is alive!

Why is it then, that for many people He is not real? I think I have several answers to offer. I could be mistaken in what I now intimate, but let me give them to you just the same:

I think for some people Jesus Christ is not as real as He can and should

"When Christ Becomes Real" (3)

be for the simple fact that they have a way of dealing with Him too much as an historical figure. It is a very important thing that a Sunday School teacher should teach her boys and girls that Jesus Christ lived, suffered and died, and taught, once upon a time, at a certain place.....

....It is an exceedingly helpful thing that she should have handy a map of Palestine, and that she might be able to say...."Now this is where Jesus lived, and this is where He taught, and here is where He preached these sermons, and here is where this miracle took place and that miracle occurred....."

....But it would be a most unfortunate thing if any Sunday School teacher would stop at that point and go on forever talking about Jesus Christ in the past tense! .....lived.....suffered.....preached.....died.....

....the story of Jesus Christ is the story of One who lives....period. But for many people, when they first think of Jesus Christ, and when they only think of Jesus Christ, it's primarily in the terms of an historical figure.....  
....someone who lived once upon a time, and did certain things, in a far-away land.

It's not an easy thing to bring Jesus up-to-date. It's not an easy thing to go back and recall these events that happened there and then--to say to others that they were contemporary in His time. Part of the difficulty for people who refused to accept Jesus Christ was that they were a people who kept God imprisoned in the past. He was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob....  
...way back there, then. One day when Jesus Christ stood up and said....

....."Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your ears--right now!....".....they tried to have done with Him. It's not an easy thing to bring Jesus up-to-date.

Maybe you would have been shocked if I had a picture here to show you right now, as I was shocked when I first saw it. A publication house for a religious group, a denomination not our own, decided to portray Jesus Christ in a very con-

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temporaneous fashion; and for the boys and girls who would use their Sunday School literature, Jesus Christ, age twelve, was wearing exactly the same kind of clothing that a twelve-year old boy in your home would be wearing today! It remains a controversial sketch. It is not an easy thing to remember that Jesus Christ lived, suffered, died....but lives now! For many people today, Jesus Christ is unreal, because He remains primarily an historical figure----years 1 - 33 A.D. ---period.

Albert Schweitzer, giant that he is in spirit, intellect, compassion..... wrote a very significant book entitled, "In Quest of the Historical Jesus." It was his intention that men and women should understand that Jesus did live, that He made an impact upon society, the society of His day....and that we never really come to understand Him unless we see Him as a person who actually lived in a certain era. But even Schweitzer himself does not succumb to the temptation to keep Jesus back there. He ends his book by saying...."---and still He comes to us today."

"---and still He comes to us today."

There's a second reason why I think Jesus Christ is not as real as He ought to be to some people: because for some people, they have a way of imprisoning Jesus Christ, not only on the page of the Bible, as a matter of historical record, but they have a way of confining Jesus Christ to certain walls and holy places. I should be disappointed indeed as the Pastor of this congregation, if Jesus Christ didn't become very real to you when you came here to this place. Why should we consecrate it--why should we call this a holy house?--if here it isn't made easier for us to be made aware of Jesus Christ?

But I should be more disappointed if this was the only place that Jesus Christ became real to you. I would have a great concern for your soul if when you turned your back upon this altar, you turned your back upon the reality of Jesus Christ. But for some people this must be said....for some people, Jesus Christ is unreal for them beyond these doors, because they associate Him too much with an

altar and with a certain place. Say this, if you will....."I come here to find Jesus Christ...", but end your sentence by adding this: "...so that I will be certain that I won't lose Him anywhere else."

Here are two reasons, it seems to me, why Jesus Christ is not as real as He ought to be to people, but He can become the ever-present Reality. How is this possible? That very remarkable short story which served as the Gospel lesson for today illustrates very definitely how Christ can become real to people.

First of all, you must recognize that Christ becomes real to us where we happen to be, in the mid-stream of life itself. And that juncture in the mid-stream of life itself may be bogged down by despair, disillusionment and bewilderment; but nonetheless Christ can become very real to us at that point. The Gospel lesson accounts two men who were turning their back upon Calvary. The thing for which they had hoped, up to that moment had failed to materialize. Disappointed and dejected, they were on their way to their home town. Nothing more was to be gained by lingering in the shadow of the cross.

And as they were picking up the strands of life by which its cloth would be woven anew, Jesus Christ came to them---where they were. Jesus Christ became real to them for the simple reason that in their despair and their bewilderment, they were earnestly concerning themselves about Him. Christ doesn't come to those who don't give Him the time of the day. Christ comes far easier to those who will think about Him---wonder about Him. Christ comes to those who are most perplexed, most bewildered, most disturbed....when they are shaken by the things that they can't figure out....when they are grounded by their blasted hopes, to which they had been clinging. If you want Christ to become very real to you, then ask yourself the very serious question: how earnestly have I concerned myself at all about Him? As these two people were walking on the road to Emmaus, the consuming passion that they had was God, and what had happened to Jesus Christ, and what it would mean in their lives.

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How seriously do you take the thought of God? How earnestly do you want Him to become real to you? Christ becomes real to us when we take up the broken strands of life and begin to weave all over again and keep on the road and do not sit idly by. I have a way of believing that Jesus Christ would never have come to them as He came to them if they would have remained in the shadow of that cross. But it was only as they picked up the strands of life and began to weave all over again that Jesus came to them. I have a way of believing that Jesus Christ came to them because as they were busy taking up life again, they couldn't ignore Him--they couldn't keep Him out of the picture....even though they couldn't understand so much, they still went on talking about Him.

For you and me, in this our day, there's a third suggestion I'd make: Christ has a way of becoming real to us when we allow ourselves the use of a bit of sanctified imagination.....

.....picture Him---coming to you.

.....picture yourself talking with Him.

.....picture yourself finding for yourself what they found for themselves in the long ago--the friends of God in Jesus Christ.

I hope that as long as I live I'll never have done with an appreciation for the hymn that was taught me in my Sunday School days...."What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Through a bit of sanctified imagination, that Friend can draw near to you right now. I warn you, intelligent, literate as you are--please don't make light of what I am about to say.

The story is told of the old Scotswoman who went to her preacher and she said, "Dominie, he's breathed his last; but Dominie, I can't thank you enough--I can't thank God enough....when I went into his room and found him lifeless, his hand was clutching the arm of the rocker beside his bed.

"I must tell you about that, Dominie. It was your predecessor who one day



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wrestled with my husband, spiritually. My husband said that Jesus Christ wasn't very real to him; and your predecessor said, 'Well, why don't you do something to help Jesus to become real to you? Imagine Jesus being right in your room--talk to Him as though you were talking to a friend---put a chair there, and picture Jesus in that chair.'

"Dominie, when he became bedridden because of his illness, that rocker was always drawn up alongside of his bed. And every now and then when I would pass his room, I would hear him talking, and invariably his hand would be on the arm of the rocker. When he breathed his last, Dominie, there was a look of the composure of peace upon his face."

Don't make light of that, my friend....I know some people, and I weigh my words carefully, who would give almost anything if Jesus Christ could be as real to them. You don't know Jesus Christ if you don't know Him as the ever-present Reality.

....He isn't a <sup>past</sup> memory.....

.....He isn't an <sup>past</sup> historical figure.....

....the Creed doesn't stop by saying, "He suffered under

Pontius Pilate--died---buried." ..... the Creed says...

"He arose.....He sits".....

.....this is the tremendous truth of the

Christian religion! Jesus Christ is alive!

"He is a path, if any be misled;  
He is a robe, if any naked be;  
If any chance to hunger, He is bread;  
If any be but weak, how strong is He.  
To dead men He is life,  
To sick men, health;  
To blind men, sight;  
To the needy, wealth."

And it's always in the present tense!

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"TO LOVE IS TO ACT"

The sermons for the most part this year in Saint Luke Church are based upon passage of Scripture taken from the Gospel according to Luke. Today's sermon bears the title, "To Love Is To Act." It is based upon one of the most familiar stories that our Lord ever spoke, commonly known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The text, the 33rd and 34th verses of the 10th chapter of Luke:

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,  
And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."

It all began this way: a young man had been greatly impressed by Jesus Christ; and once when he had the opportunity, he involved Him in conversation. He began by asking a question....

"What do I have to do to be assured eternal life?"

One could put that question in this way,

"What do I have to do, Master, to be guaranteed, perpetually, the smile of God's favor?"

Jesus said, "All right, you ask me a question---I'll answer you by asking you a question. What does the Bible say? Can you quote me the answer of Scripture to your question?"

And so the young man said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."

And Jesus said, "Why, you've answered perfectly! You asked me a question-- I answered you by asking the question, and the answer that you gave to my question is the answer to your question!"

Some of us become uncomfortable when we get the answers to the questions we

"To Love Is To Act" (2)

ask.....because the answer to the question that we've asked means involvement. It means--we ought to do something. The young man was a very clever chap. So he began asking another question. It's a very clever device---as long as you can keep talking, you don't have to do anything. Committees have a way of functioning like that sometime..."We'll table it for the present--we'll pick it up some other time." Then we talk and we talk and we say, "Well, we'll pick it up again.".....we have a way of keeping from being challenged by action itself. As long as I can keep talking, I may not have to do anything.

So this young man employed this device by asking the question,

"All right, Jesus, let me ask you another question. The Bible says I should love my neighbor as myself, but Jesus, tell me, who is my neighbor?"

And the young man thought, this is wonderful, now. I'm calling the shots. I'll maneuver this thing.

But Jesus answered him in an unforgettable way; and once He was finished, there was no doubt in the man's mind as to what the answer should be to his question.

Jesus said, "Let me tell you something. Once upon a time there was a man going down a certain road from Jerusalem to Jericho and as he traveled that road, he fell among thieves. These robbers left him half dead, they took everything that he had, even took his clothing. There in the dust, broken and bruised and bloodied, he was at the mercy of the next person who might come along.

"Now it happened," says Jesus, "that the first man who came along....." ah, I hesitate to tell you this--I indict myself, you see, and no one likes to indict himself.....

.....the first man who came along was a preacher man--religion was his business, if one dare use such a phrase as that---he was a priest. And Jesus said, when this man came and saw this man in need, he passed by on the other side.

Jesus said there was another man who was traveling that road. Now when this

man came---he too belonged to the church...(if you begin to squirm, it's understandable)....he, too, belonged to the church. Now when he came and saw this man in need---at least we can say this thing for him---he stopped.....and he took a good look. It wasn't simply curiosity. At least he was interested enough to take a good look. This is promising, isn't it? He's paying some attention to a man in need. But, lo and behold! said Jesus, having looked, he passed by on the other side!

This, too, is a familiar technique. We attend a meeting---we're very much interested---we listen---and then suddenly the pitch comes.....

....there's an offering to be taken....

.....there's a subscription list that's going to be formed.....

....and then, perhaps, we'll leave the meeting before this happens.

....or we have a way of listening to a radio program or watching a television program.....

.....and then when the appeal is made.....

.....when we've begun to be a little bit troubled by what we've witnessed, we turn off the set and walk away. We've taken a look, but at a very safe and comfortable distance.

But Jesus said there was a third man---a Samaritan---a most unlikely character, as far as doing good was concerned, because he didn't belong to the church, you see, or at least the established church of that day....and he didn't enjoy a very good reputation, as far as the Jews were concerned.....

Jesus said this man, when he came to the place where he was, saw the man, and went to him.....

.....he bound up his wounds, he poured in oil, he gave him whatever

medication that he had.....

.....he picked him up and put him on his own beast.....

"To Love Is To Act" (4)

.....he walked alongside of the man--on his own beast....until he got him to a place where he could give him even better care.

And the story ends by the man saying to the inn-keeper...."Here's enough money to take care of him for a day or so, and if he needs more attention, when I come back again, I will pay you."

Jesus said, "Now which of these three men do you think was neighbor to the man that fell among thieves?"

And the lawyer had to answer---it was so obvious, so un-ambiguous, very, very plain....."Why, the man who showed mercy."

Jesus said, "All right....you go and do likewise."

Love is never love unless it does something. If you want a definition for love, how about this.....it is activated good will. It not only sees, but it does. Love not only has eyes, but it has hands. Love must always act.) Let us put it this way---three different ways, if you please.....

( Love must begin to act wherever need shows its face....wherever need shows its face. And that may be very uncomfortably near at hand. The good Samaritan did not choose the place where he was going to show himself a loving person. He happened to be there. And love must be prepared to go into action wherever it may be. It's an easy thing for you and me to become compassionate for certain people in Africa....Hong Kong....Asia. It's a certain thing that's very easy for you and me to become compassionate for our cousins in Europe. But when love is called upon to go into action where one happens to be at the present moment, may be something that you and I are not prepared to face or willing to face.

I run the risk of disillusioning you, I know this, but for all Thomas Carlyle's moralizing, his wife said she never knew him to show her a kindly gracious smile.....Tolstai---these wonderful stories that he wrote, that have made a lasting impression upon your mind and upon mine....his widow said,"for 32 years, I never knew

him to be kind to me....I never knew him to even so much as to give my child a drink of water." He could write wonderful stories, and people could write wonderful stories about him--how he carried water for the Russian prisoners....but close at hand--within the walls of his own home, his love seemed unprepared for action.

The story of the Good Samaritan is the story of the man who was prepared to put his love into deeds wherever the need appeared, uncomfortably close at hand as it was.

(The second thing is this.....Love always goes into action with what it happens to have at hand. And the marvelous thing about love is this--it always has enough by which to begin. The eternally precious thing about love is this--that it's never empty-handed. Love always has something by which to begin. It may not be much, but it always has something by which to begin.

The Good Samaritan immediately took stock of his own resources.....

....he had health--he had strength.....he could lift the man and put him on his own beast.....

....he had a bottle of wine---he would pour it on the man's wounds.....

.....he would use what he had---where he was-----at the precise moment of need.....

.....he happened to have some coins in his pocket....and when he got to the innkeeper, he paid him--using whatever funds that he had...

.....and because he had a good name and because his credit was good, he was even willing to employ that in behalf of someone else's need.

.....Love always has enough by which to begin!

Love always goes into action, despite the <sup>indifference</sup> ~~endeavors~~ of other people. He might have known, perhaps, somehow, that there were two other people who came that way. And he could have said to himself...."Well if they didn't have time--if they weren't interested, why should I be interested?.....If they didn't do what they were

"To Love Is To Act" (6)

expected to do, and if a religious person isn't expected to love, then who should be expected to love?.....and if they didn't do anything, why should I?....."

....a very familiar cry, isn't it? Love never takes time to look around to see whether or not other people are doing anything. Love always goes to work at once. It never surveys the scene, except the immediate locale.

Now Jesus said to the man who asked the question, "This is a story--what do you think about it?"

And the man said, "The man who was the real neighbor was the man who showed mercy."

Jesus said, "All right--you go and you do likewise."

Beloved, for anyone who is willing to listen to Jesus Christ, he'll get an answer to his question, and the answer usually carries no alternative. It was as simple as this.....

Jesus said....."You go and you do likewise."

(The Good Samaritan should become your patron saint--you follow in his footsteps. And the longer I live, the more I'm convinced that you can divide all people who travel the highway of life into four groups, and only four groups.

There is group #1: the traveler along the highway of life who becomes victimized. He can't help it. There are those who are willing, waiting, desirous to take advantage of him. And the highway of life is strewn with humanity who have been the victims of other people. No matter how ideal you may make a situation, there will always be those who fall, who are hurt, who are taken advantage of.

The second group of people along the highway of life is made up of those who make it their business to defraud other people. Whatever they have, they have because they've taken from somebody else. They live because they steal. They are not productive. They are life's grabbers.

Life has a third group...The people who travel along the highway of life who are made aware of this misery--they are very able people; in fact they might even become members of a Committee To Build a Hospital at the Foot of the Jericho Road. They might even become members of a committee which would call for more police patrol. But alas and alack! they never personally become involved. The third group of people---people who pass by on the other side---people who don't steal, and people, perhaps, from whom others might not steal....the people who have and will say..."What I have belongs to me--what's mine is mine own." They are the keepers.

There's a fourth group.....

....."What I have, I will share.

.....What I have is not mine alone. What I have is mine to use  
to alleviate the suffering of anyone else....."

They ask no questions. They simply give.....and give.....and give.

They are the ones who spell love out in terms of life. Who is the man who took a passage of Scripture--a passage of Scripture that reads like this....

"Nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me."

....and he took one of the words in that passage of Scripture and changed it--triumphantly, majestically...and he said.....

"Nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ loves in me"--

....."Christ loves through me."

.....Could this be your descriptive?

\* \* \* \*



"WHEN GOD BECOMES CONTEMPORARY"

The sermon bears the title, "When God Becomes Contemporary" and the text is the 21st verse of the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And he began to say unto them, This day  
is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

It all happened very much as you might have supposed it would have happened. Jesus had been away from Nazareth for some time. He had assumed the role of the itinerant preacher. People in the Near East are always eager to hear someone who comes, presumably with authority, and who has something to tell them that otherwise they might not hear. Wherever He had gone, He had always found a following; and in some places that He visited, He had often performed a miracle or two.

Now report had gotten back to His home town about the wonderful things that He was able to do; and when word was circulated in Nazareth that the carpenter's son was in their village---their own home-town boy---having made good at Capernaum, as an example---was spending a day or two in their own village....well, the crowd was exactly as you would have supposed it would have been--a rather large one--at the synagogue in Nazareth. In fact, you would have had trouble getting a seat. In all likelihood, there were some people who didn't get on the inside, and had you been one of those standing there at the door, this is what you might have seen: the synagogue filled to capacity....a group of people standing on the outside. This was a bit of the conversation that was taking place....

"Why, he hasn't changed much---he looks pretty much as I last saw him."

"And there are strangers with him, too, aren't there? Do you suppose these  
are his so-called followers?"

"Well, what do you suppose will happen here this morning?".....

The man in charge of the synagogue service conducted it up to a point very much as he conducted any other synagogue service. They had all the important parts of the

worship service in order; and then when it came to have the lessons read, the ruler of the synagogue, having surveyed the people present, had his eye fall upon Jesus. And there, too, he did just about the thing that you would have done, everything occurring now just as we might have expected.

The man in charge of the service said,

"We have with us today one of our own young men. He has been away for some time. He's returned to our village. Jesus, son of Joseph, we would like very much if you would honor us by reading the lesson today."

Now this was done quite often, when the ruler of the synagogue would invite a member of the congregation to read the lesson.

So Jesus came forward, and the person whose duty it was to reach for the sacred writing got the scroll designated for that particular service and handed it to Him; and Jesus, with the utmost of reverence, unrolled it; and then He read the lesson appointed for that day.

Now let me read for you what He read.....

"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,  
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,  
To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Now this was the lesson that He read; then when He was finished reading, He handed the scroll back to the person who gave it to Him.....and the congregation was amazed, and fairly well pleased, for Jesus sat down. This was the indication that He was going to speak.

In the synagogue, a man stood up to read the lesson....if he had a sermon or a homily or an address that he was going to deliver, he would sit down as soon as he had read.

"What do you suppose he'll tell us? Will he be as good here as he was in Capernaum?"....this was the type of question that went through their minds.

Lo and behold, when Jesus began to speak....well we have a record of what He said---as soon as He began to speak, this is what He said,

"I tell you, today this scripture is being fulfilled in your ears."

Well, did you expect Jesus to do anything else but that? He began at the only point at which Jesus could begin---the immediate moment---making a present-day application of a timeless truth.

(Well now, wait a second, will you, my friend....think of all the things that Jesus might have talked about that day to that congregation in Nazareth. And all that He could have said would have been true and very acceptable to them.

He could have stood up and said.....

....."Isn't it terrible, my friends, the type of thing that you and I have to endure and to experience in this perilous time in which we live! It's a pathetic thing, my townspeople, it's a lamentable thing!---that for all of these years we've been an occupied people. Isn't it high time that we threw off the yoke of the oppressor?"

He could have gotten a hearing, and they'd have been very happy to hear him talk like that. And He could have gone on telling them all about the ills that they had to endure---simply reciting them.....

.....the high taxes.....

.....the miserable treatment that they were given at  
the hand of the Roman soldiers.....

...the lack of genuine interest in the things of God  
on the part of their neighbors.....

....He could have gone on, reciting these ills, talking about the terrible conditions, talking about the things that had brought them to pass.....

Jesus could have done that....and there are some people who do that very thing--

--in every sermon that they preach--in every conversation of which they are a part...  
....all they do is simply state and re-state a problem, a misery, a burden.

Another thing that Jesus could have done---He could have said.....

...."I want to tell you something---some day it won't be like this.

Let me paint a picture for you of the future".....and then He could have spent all of His time painting for them a picture of a heaven that was yet to come.

It's always a safe thing to talk about the past. It's an equally safe thing to talk about the future.....Jesus Christ did none of these. Jesus Christ said,

....."I am here to tell you that today this scripture is being fulfilled

in your ears. I shan't waste my time re-stating the problem, and

I shan't talk to you about something that's going to happen ten

years from now.....but I am here to tell you that right now---

--today-- this scripture is going to come to life....."

This is an exceedingly difficult thing to do!

Harry Emerson Fosdick once said that when he looked over his congregation on a Sunday, he kept saying to himself.....'There is a problem behind every face--every persons who's in church right now has some kind of a problem---a problem perhaps known only to himself and to God'.....and then he would pray to God, this preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, that something that he might say might help that person to meet his problem. In much that same spirit I come to this sacred desk today, earnestly praying that God might help you to say....."This day I shall face my problem--this day."

Now will you please note that when Jesus Christ spoke this way, He put Himself in the middle of the solution; or as someone has also said...."Whenever you're confronted by a problem, see yourself more as part of the answer than the problem itself."  
....and when Jesus said, "This day this scripture is going to be fulfilled in your ears," he projected Himself straight in the middle of the picture. He could not think of the answer to the problem without seeing Himself.

"When God Becomes Contemporary" (5)

...God always acts like that....God is always contemporary.

....God always gets involved with the thing as it is now.

...God never wastes time talking about something that might have been.

....God never sheds too many tears about something that's already happened.

....God uses the energy of the eternal to concern Himself with the present moment.

I'm not unmindful of the fact that Jesus talked about preaching the gospel to the poor....healing the broken-hearted.....preaching deliverance to the captives...giving sight to the blind.....freeing people that were bruised.....

.....I'm not unmindful of the fact that by the time Jesus Christ died there were almost as many people broken-hearted, bruised and defeated as when He began His ministry.....for a good many people in the world at the time of the ministry of Jesus Christ, Jesus Himself made no great perceptible impact upon society---just as many poor people when He died, perhaps, as when He began preaching---just as many people in jails when He died, no doubt, as when He began His ministry.....

Jesus Christ did not say to Himself.....

"I shall refrain from doing anything about the problem, because it's a hopeless situation."

Jesus Christ did not permit Himself to think.....

" I shan't do anything, because whatever I do may be only a drop in the bucket."

Jesus Christ did not talk like that. Jesus Christ said.....

"Today--I'm going to do something about....where I am....with what I have.....and I shall begin with those nearest at hand."

In recent years we shed a great many tears concerning the ineffectiveness of the Christian Church. I myself, perhaps, could be indicted on that score. On the

last day of the Maryland Synod as it met in Baltimore, I proposed a resolution that the Executive Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Maryland should study this very sad and terrible fact.....that in the year 1960 we did not as much as gain 1% in active membership over the preceding year. Between 150 and 200 congregations in this metropolitan area of Baltimore and Washington, where the population boom is on---we could not say to our Lord and Saviour that we had even as much as 1% gain in active membership over the previous year! )

Maybe some of us worry at that point because we're suffering from a success complex. We feel that overnight churches must be bursting at the seams. We think that everywhere, as shopping centers are going on, so churches ought to be built overnight---people should flock to them, just as they flock to know the benefit of a commercial enterprise.

Suppose Jesus Christ would have said...."Well what's the use---we've been burdened so long....we've been defeated so long....what's the use of talking to one single person about his broken heart?...what's the use of talking to one single person about the salvation of his soul---when everywhere you see how the devil has people in his hand, and there are people who are going straight to hell with a smile on their face.....what's the use?"

Jesus Christ did not talk like that! Jesus Christ said,

"Today--I'm going to begin."

And so He did.

.....I'm not unaware of the fact that it cost Him His life.

.....I'm not unaware of the fact that in His day He never saw the full benefit of the impact that He was making upon people's lives....

....I'm not unmindful of the fact that He had one disappointment after another....and I'm still close enough to the Easter-tide and to the Holy Week to remember that when the chips were down---every

single one of the disciple band forsook Him and fled....one even so much as betrayed Him and denied Him.....

.....against a situation when the odds were as great as that, Jesus Christ still said,

"But today I'm going to make a beginning."

I must remind you that when God made His beginning through Christ, there were some people who never knew the benefit---people of Nazareth as an example...the treatment that He got in Nazareth was such that He never again returned. And Nazareth goes down in history as "the town that missed its chance." He could do wonderful works in Capernaum.....

God says to us.....

"Your world is in a mess....this is never the way I intended it....but I'll tell you what--I'll come to your world, and I'll put myself right where you are--I will identify myself in the present moment with your situation. Will you help me?"

It's as simple as this:

....You find one person, and if he has a broken heart, you try to help him....

.....you find another person, and if he's blind, you try to be to him as a pair of eyes.....

.....you find another person, if he's imprisoned by fear, hatred, jealousy....you try to release him from his bondage....

.....you do it person to person---one at a time.....

.....and you always begin at the present moment.

Once upon a time there was Someone who believed that.....

.....and the world has never been the same since.

"THE CHRISTIAN HOME"

This second Sunday in May is being increasingly observed as the Festival of the Christian Home. With that thought in mind, the sermon is based upon that theme. Rather than offer you a text from Holy Scripture this morning, the basis for the sermon is drawn from a prayer which draws its inspiration from the Holy Scripture itself. The prayer is one of three that can be used in the Marriage Service in the Lutheran Church.

A number of fine things have been introduced to us when we first used the Lutheran Service Book and Hymnal several years ago. This is most certainly true in the marriage service of the church. If you've attended a marriage service recently, when we've used the order as prescribed in the Lutheran Service Book and Hymnal, you will notice that in the exchange of vows there is a more specific rendition of what each person promises the other. It is spelled out very clearly....."for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better, for worse".....there's no question about what could be involved in my attachment to this person, in the name of Jesus Christ.

But for me personally, the thing that has been most helpful in whatever change has taken place in the marriage service has been the introduction of two additional prayers. Let me read one of them for you.....

O GOD, who art our dwelling-place in all generations:  
Look with favor upon the homes of our land; enfold  
husbands and wives, parents and children, in the  
bonds of thy pure love; and so bless our homes, that  
they may be a shelter for the defenceless, a bulwark  
for the tempted, a resting-place for the weary, and  
a foretaste of our eternal home in thee; through  
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It does exactly what the marriage service ought to do. It includes not only a prayer for the couple now being married, but every time a wedding service is



"The Christian Home" (2)

solemnized before the altar in this church, the Pastor may be in duty bound to make a prayer not only for them but for every home that's already been established; and this is the prayer that is made. Please remember, therefore, that every time a marriage service is solemnized, the people assembled together are asked to lift their thoughts heavenward not only for this home, but for all the homes of our parish, and for every Christian home in particular.

I don't know of anything that I've read in recent time that quite describes for me as effectively the Christian home as the basic outline of this prayer. You ask me what a Christian home is? -- and now I can quickly answer:

Why, a Christian home is a shelter for the defenceless.....

....it's a bulwark for the tempted.....

....it's a resting-place for the weary.....

....it's a foretaste of our eternal home with Jesus Christ!

The word is carefully chosen, my friend.....I said the Christian home. This descriptive is naturally limited. You can't possibly apply this to every home, because this is the last thing that many homes have become. For some people, home is anything else but a bit of heaven....it has become a veritable hell for some people ...and that's why they would run away from it, as quickly as they can and as far as they could.

It's because for some people a home is far from being a resting-place---- that either the man or the woman have come to seek refuge anywhere else but home. Understanding?.....contentment?.....they look elsewhere, just because the home is no longer this type of thing. It's not only true of the man and the woman--the husband and the wife.....it's also true for young people. It becomes a lamentable thing for those of us who work with young people to discover how all too frequently, and ever so easily, young people too naturally look elsewhere for the very thing that they ought to be getting at home.

### "The Christian Home" (3)

Being a parent, I stand quickly to justify the role of the parent. The parent is not always to blame. I am not pleading the case at that point. But I do know that there are some youngsters who go elsewhere just because they need what they need and because the home doesn't give it. Human as they are, they'll look till they find it, and what they get may have varying degrees of virtue and merit.

Let's look at these four descriptives of the Christian home:

A shelter for the defenceless.....It isn't an accident that some of us are weak. Some of us can't possibly be as strong as other people. Some of us, even from the very day when we were born, had certain limitations crowned upon us...we've tried to have done with them, but as we run our course, we naturally gravitate toward anything that will give us a sense of shelter....and in the plan of God, God says.....

....."Let this shelter be the Christian home, where anyone who can't withstand the pressures of life itself, when he comes home, can find protection."

Every now and then, as a Pastor I do it---I hope only from a pastor's heart...  
...I ask leading questions. I did it some time ago with a precious soul whose marriage lasted little more than a year, and then a cruel blow of life itself took away from her her loved one.....and their child came---perhaps four months after the father had died. And I said to her, as I saw her several times....."You're a marvel to me! How are you able to withstand this terrible burden? You have a spiritual maturity,, the like of which I have seldom found in people twice your age!"

And her answer---as beautiful, as eloquent, as it could possibly be.....

"When I was a youngster and I was frightened or hurt, the first place I ever wanted to go was to run home as quickly as I possibly could. And, Pastor, you'll never know how much my home means to me right now."

And I'm happy to report that it was the kind of home where the Lord Jesus Christ is honored and revered---where His presence is felt---you have only to cross the threshold, and you know that Jesus Christ is there...A shelter for the defenceless.

A bulwark for the tempted.....I don't know that any generation has ever been called upon to face the temptations like our generation has to face, especially now, since it's been true for this generation in particular, where all of us go out to face the world.....

.....teenagers become involved in all phases of life ever so early....

.....and since woman has come into her new freedom, she, too, becomes

so easily involved where she works, and where she goes for her

hours of pleasure and relaxation.....

.....in view of the fact that all of us who live in a home are thrust against the world in so many different areas, the devil has ever so many more opportunities by which to tempt us. What a salutary thing it is to know that in a home, in a home where Jesus Christ is honored and revered.....that when we withdraw from the world, at least in the fellowship of those who are near and dear in the family circle, there is enough of Jesus Christ to be found in that circle that makes us strong against the temptation that comes to us from the outside world.

( Who is the man---I wish I could remember his name---who said, "It was only for me to look into the eyes of my mother, and I think I could find something that would help me to face anything!" How fortunate is that person who can say that of any parent.....to draw inspiration and courage.....to be able to do battle against the devil ---anywhere---so long as he could come home and look into a face of character like that! )

The Christian home, according to the prayer in the Marriage Service, should be a resting-place for the weary.....and that can be of whatever age. Young people have a way of becoming tired---young people have a way of becoming fed up with life.

.....Middle-aged people who experience one frustration after another---who become disappointed and disillusioned.....why is it worth going back to the office on a Monday morning?.....

.....Older people who face the sunset years of their life---tired and worn out.....how fortunate to be able to experience within the

family circle ....a place of quiet rest and serenity.

When all three are present, then it seems to me we have what the prayer puts forth as the projection of the eternal home.....that every Christian home should be a foretaste of heaven itself. Quite frequently you and I say...."If only somewhere in the world there could be just a corner where I could really get a taste of what heaven's going to be like.".....

.....and God says..."All right--here's a family circle. This can be what it should be like!"

I give you now the descriptive of a Christian home....from the prayers of the Marriage Service.....

O GOD, who art our dwelling-place in all generations:  
Look with favor upon the homes of our land; enfold  
husbands and wives, parents and children, in the  
bonds of thy pure love; and so bless our homes, that  
they may be a shelter for the defenceless, a bulwark  
for the tempted, a resting-place for the weary, and  
a foretaste of our eternal home in thee; through  
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

But to get a home like that, it just doesn't happen automatically.....

.....it has to be planned for.....

.....it has to be prayed for.....

.....it has to be prepared for.....

.....maybe time hasn't run out for you yet!

\* \* \* \*

"THE SPIRIT POSSESSED"

On this day of Pentecost the sermon bears the title, "The Spirit Possessed" and the text is a portion of the 1st and 4th verses of the Second Chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.....

And they were filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance."

When I began my ministry for the Lord Jesus Christ, in company with a lot of other young men fresh from the Seminary, I used to spend a great deal of time trying to find the perfect title for the sermon that I was about to preach; and I frankly confess to you, sometime I spent entirely too much time on choosing the title rather than dealing with the content itself.

( There is one title I remember that I used for an interesting biographical study of one of the most remarkable men that England ever produced. It was a study in the life of General Bramwell Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army... and the title--and a rather clever one I thought it was that I chose as a descriptive for that man's life...." A Straight-shooter For Souls" .....for Booth made it the ambition of his life that wherever he went, he'd share with people something of the overflow of his life, ~~but with a~~ commitment to Jesus Christ. It was a consuming passion with him that wherever he might be, people would know that he was filled with the spirit of God---that no man that he might ever touch could possibly have anything less than something of the Spirit of God through him. )

I'm thinking particularly of Bramwell Booth today because they tell the story of an old Negro who in London one time, went to the place where they buried Bramwell Booth; and as he was kneeling at his grave, he was heard to say...."O

"The Spirit Possessed" (2)

God, why don't you do it again.....

"O God, let it happen once more.....

"O God, maybe it can happen to me the way it happened to him."

Whenever he thought of Bramwell Booth, this old man thought of a man who was Spirit-possessed.....a man who had been touched and claimed.....a man whose heart was undeniably marked for Jesus Christ.

This is the day of Pentecost. When you and I remember that first Pentecost, we remember that something happened to a people....and after they had been in a certain place, they went out and they faced the world; and wherever they went people were made aware that Jesus Christ was alive and was in their hearts.

I frankly confess to you that not everyone knows exactly how it happened on that day of Pentecost. Luke himself was not present--the writer of the Acts of the Apostles....and he had to depend very largely on the information that other people gave him. Something tremendous had taken place, and they were forever talking about it.

Just how it happened?....well, they had to rely upon descriptives--the kind of thing that you and I say when something occurs to us, makes a great impact upon us....like when we use the figure of speech--"Why, it hit me like a ton of bricks".....so great was the impact! Of course, one wasn't hit by a ton of bricks, or he wouldn't be able to be there to tell what had happened. But it's a descriptive--a figure of speech.

And these disciples kept talking about this wonderful thing that happened to them on the day of Pentecost. And what was it like?....

....One person said--"It was like the sound of a mighty, rushing wind from heaven. Why, it seemed to fill the whole place where we were.....!"

.....and another said--"It was as though cloven tongues of fire rested

"The Spirit Possessed" (3)

upon each one of us---each one of us..... and then when it was all over, we rushed out into the street---we began to talk---we couldn't be silent-- each one of us began preaching....."

And then do you know what? All the other people who gathered around said....

"We understand.....this is made plain to us....."

.....and the one word that they had for all of it----

'God' ..... 'God' ..... 'God'

(When the disciples looked back upon the experience, now they had to agree they couldn't explain it in any other way...."Why, we were all filled with the Holy Ghost!....we were all filled with God!"

Interesting expression, isn't it? The Bible uses it several times when it talks about New Testament Christians--people who were filled with the Holy Spirit.' In these years that God has allowed me to live, I've heard people described in many ways--full of this thing and full of that.

I've heard people say, "The man is full of hate, Pastor.....

....."the man is full of greed.....

....."the man is full of envy.....

...."Pastor, she's full of bitterness.....

....."full of suspicion....."

In the New Testament they used to talk about people. When they talked about some of those people, they said.....

....."They're full of God.....

....."they are the God-possessed---the Spirit-possessed...."

In some translations they're referred to as "the God-inebriated".

How does one get that way? In this very lovely Chapel of the Grateful Heart in Saint Luke Church you'll notice, when you go in there for prayer, that at the crossing above the opening for the communion rail there is the symbol of the Holy

"The Spirit Possessed" (4)

Spirit....it's the dove descending from heaven with fire in his mouth---descend-  
ing from heaven. The Spirit-possessed are people who have something that comes to them--something that claims them--something that lays hold upon them. No man can ever lay hold upon God. The glory of the Christian religion is that God lays hold upon ~~them~~ us.....that God takes someone like you and can possess you, and can fill you with His love and His mercy!

Well now, how did it happen for those people? There were certain conditions that had to be met for that revival in their lives....and I would say to that old man kneeling upon the grave of General Bramwell Booth.....

....if you want it to happen again, you'd better fulfill the conditions that were necessary when it did happen on the day of Pentecost, long, long ago.

In the first place, all of these people who were filled with the Spirit of God, the fire rested upon each one of them.....all of them were in that room--wait-  
ing---because they were obeying Jesus Christ. They who went to the upper room where Pentecost took place were all of them people who were there under orders. Jesus had said to them...."Now you wait at Jerusalem. I'm making a promise for you, but you wait....."

....and I would like to think that had you been standing there at the door of the upper room, and as each person came, you would have said....

...."What brings you here?".....

and each man in turn would have said....

...."Jesus Christ. I have remembered what He said to me.

I am here in His name....."

Beloved, think what would happen in this place right now if this were the answer that every one of us would be able to give as you cross the threshold of



"The Spirit Possessed" (5)

this place....."What brings you here?"....

...."I am remembering the command of my Lord and Saviour. I am

here in His name. He brings me here....my loyalty is to Him."

I don't know what I would do if I were ever pastor of a church that was split down the middle. I don't know what I would ever do if I were pastor of a church that had factions. The crowning glory of this congregation is her unity of mind and spirit and purpose, putting herself together with one common spirit to one common task....and this is always possible when the people have one thing in common---their allegiance to Jesus Christ. This is what makes the glorious esprit de corps of the Christian Church.

They tell me once that Napoleon Bonaparte, master-strategist that he was, discovered that there was a lack of harmony and unity among his lieutenants, the men upon whom he was relying; and when this information came to him, he devised a very clever thing.....he stationed himself in a room that was perfectly bare--no furniture of any type.....and in a room that only had two doors. Somewhere between those two doors, farther from the entrance than from the exit, he placed himself. Then he issued an order that each of his lieutenants concerning whom he had heard this evidence of infidelity---each of these lieutenants was to enter the room, one at a time, no one else was to be in that room as long as Napoleon and one other man was there.

.....The door would open, and as the man entered, the lieutenant was forced to focus his eyes upon Napoleon Bonaparte, his leader. He walked straight toward him. Bonaparte did nothing but stretch out his hand, shake the hand of the lieutenant, look him straight in the eye.....and never said a word.....and then the man left the room.....

This happened lieutenant after lieutenant. The psychology was terrific....

"The Spirit Possessed" (6)

....."I am your leader....you are my lieutenant.....I ask for your loyalty."

.....this was the electrifying thing that went between the two of them.)

.....They who came to the upper room---each one who came--had been someone who at one time or another in his life had been confronted by Jesus Christ...and he came back under orders.

They were men and women who went to that upper room who also had a common experience....each one of them having looked straight into the eye of Jesus Christ and discovered one thing: - that Jesus Christ loved them and was counting on them. Now you know who they were, don't you? They were for the most part people who had fallen short---every single person in the upper room had been someone who could be numbered with those who forsook Jesus Christ...ran away,...betrayed, or denied Him. Each one of them had short-changed Jesus Christ. They had this experience in common. And each one of them in turn had received the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.....each one in turn knew that God through Christ had given them another chance.....each one in turn knew that Jesus Christ came back to them. Jesus Christ proffered forgiveness, and He said....."I love you.....I will never have done with you!"

As I stand here this morning and scan this congregation, seat by seat, almost person to person, I could marvel at the variety of paths that you have taken to come to Saint Luke Church this morning. I have been here long enough to know certain things about some of you that I could also marvel at the variety of your temperaments and your personalities. I have been here long enough that I could almost tell the path that some of you have taken---halfway across this nation--'til you've established residence in this community.....the variety of paths that you've taken.....the variety of temperament and personality.....

.....That doesn't cause me to marvel nearly as much...but when I stand here and look at you, person to person and seat after seat, there's one thing that each

of us claims.....

.....God loves us.....

.....Jesus Christ forgives us.....

.....and the love that God has for me is no less than the love that He has for the person in front of me or alongside of me....  
.....and the love that God has for the person behind me is no less--no more-- than He has for me. The disciples who went to the upper room knew that.

In the third place, when they went to that upper room, they expected something to happen. They weren't people who just casually gathered in that upper room on Pentecost. They weren't people who went there because they didn't have any other place to go. They weren't people who went there because it was inconvenient to go any other place.....they were people who went there because they expected Jesus Christ to fulfill the promise that He had made....

.....He kept saying....."You wait! Something's going to happen....

.....My Spirit will come to you."

Now when you have people with a mind like that, expecting something to happen....

.....when you have people coming that love the Lord Jesus Christ, and they

have Him in common.....

.....in a situation like that.....it's easy for the Holy Spirit to operate. They are of one mind and one spirit.

Last night I sat as delighted as any person in Bieber Hall.....and one of the things that impressed me most when this precious band of young people put on the Variety Show was the finale.....50 radiant young people--a smile on the face of every single one of them. They had participated in a common endeavor. They had shared in the performance of every other single person. They had this experience together. As I sat there ~~between~~ by the lectern this morning, I thought to myself.....and this, too, is a precious thing.....the young people in the choir singing their anthem--several other young people here, near the front, as they sang, I saw the motion, the movement, of their lips.....they were following with the

"The Spirit Possessed" (8)

anthem, too. They had shared a common experience---they were one with this group.

This is what it is to know the meaning of Pentecost....to have one Lord....  
....to be possessed by one Spirit--the Spirit of God.

It can happen again. For some of us, we like to think it happens every  
Sunday when we come to this place....

.....and if it doesn't.....if it doesn't.....

.....the barrier is not with God.

\* \* \*

"GOD'S NEW AGE"

The sermons for the most part this year in Saint Luke Church have been based upon the Gospel of Luke. Today's sermon bears the title, "God's New Age"; and as the background for the sermon, four verses from the 6th chapter of Luke, beginning with the 32nd verse:

"For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. but love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

Perhaps you ought to be at least forty years of age if you can best appreciate the statement that I am about to make. A very simple statement it is: We are living in a new age. If God has given you at least four decades of life, you have only to remember what has transpired since the day you were born.

It's a very clever thing that some advertising firm has done, showing on very excellent pages in certain periodicals the dateline, the photograph of an outstanding personality of that time, and then saying, "If you were born in such-and-such a year.. .. ." Now whether you pay any attention now to the product or service that's being advertized, immediately your mind goes to work, and you begin to think of all that has happened since that year.

It's almost incredible to recognize what has happened in the past four decades.. ..in this period of time we have been able to see the face and to hear the voice of a man who has soared into space.....  
.....in this period of time an electrical device has been invented that can

"God's New Age" (2)

do the work of two hundred men.....

.....in this period of time a man has flown single-handedly the Atlantic Ocean, and we are appalled at what has happened ever since.....

.....in this period of time one nation after another has come into its own.....

.....and for the socially politically minded, it is this generation that has produced the voice, echoing from a high place, that it's absolutely possible that in the foreseeable future there could be in the White House a man--if one wants to put it this way--- whose great-grandfather had been a slave! .....

Times have changed. This is a different age. This is a new age.

The lamentable thing is this.....that far too many of us are going into the new age with outworn ideas. Far too many of us have come upon this new age totally unprepared to make the adventure into a realm of new emotions....new thoughts....more significant, if you please, pulsebeats. This is the lamentable thing.

As I stand in this pulpit I am reminded that almost two thousand years ago there was an itinerant Preacher who said to His congregation.....

....."A new world is at your finger-tips....a new age has come...."

.....and He laid down basic principles for the new age that He was talking about two thousand years ago. That new age is properly labeled, "God's New Age".....an age in which men and women begin to live on earth the way people do things in Heaven.....an age in which men and women treat each other on the very same basis as they want God to treat them. And I say to you this morning, unless you and I go into this new world of which we are a part with that frame of mind, man himself will ultimately ruin the world which he himself has created.

Basically, the world belongs to God. God made the world.... and God knows how it can best operate. God lay down His rules and regulations for it, and if you never

thought of putting it this way, why not put it this way.....that once upon a time God sent His own Son into the world, if for no other purpose, then certainly to accomplish this---that He might call to your attention and to mine the fine print of the rules and the regulations by which this world was meant to operate.....

.....that Jesus, God incarnate, would call to our attention that the only way this world was meant to run smoothly, wisely and well was on the basic principle of love.....and not until men and women subscribe to that basic principle of love will the world ever rightly and properly be referred to as God's New Age. Otherwise, we go on just as we've gone on before.

( It's always good for a preacher to be cut down to size; and I have had my share of that type of thing happening to me. And I remember once when I stood on a train, packed as it was, in the midlands of England....and a gentleman came to me and engaged in conversation a small group of us. He was tremendously interested in getting our reaction to the new world--the new England after the war. It was now 1947, barely two years since the last bomb had been dropped.

And we had to say to him what we had to say.....it was amazing to discover what the British had done---how they had cleared their streets---how they had taken the debris and put it into the ocean.....and how they had begun to reconstruct one building after another. I had never seen anything that could quite match it, and in my enthusiasm I began talking to him in terms of brick and mortar, and I began sharing with him some of the results of the interviews that I had had with some of their distinguished educators and politicians.....and I told him, "I am amazed at the new world that's in the making---the way you're going to rebuild your cities--the schemes and the plans that you're going to have for your welfare state....why, I've never heard anything like it."

And he turned and he looked at me and he said, "You talk only of programs.... ....you talk only of building.....did it ever occur to you that you ought to ask

the question.....'Will the man of the future be any different than the man of the past? will the basic social order, man to man and brother to brother, be changed? .....or will our cities simply get a new look?' This, of course, is always the question that has to be asked.

Wasn't it Edwin Markham who said:

"Why build these cities glorious,  
If man unbuilded goes;  
In vain we build the work,  
Unless the builder also grows."

One day, two thousand years ago, an itinerant Preacher came to a group of people and He began talking to them about a new age, and He called it God's New Age.....

....and He talked about new people---people who would treat one another differently than they had treated them in the past.....

.....and He laid down basic rules and regulations.....and the first rule was this---in God's New Age, whatever happens between people must happen because people love one another. )

You and I are always dealing with the results of interaction. If some preachers are worth their salt at all, what they have to do in some congregations is go around and always pick up the pieces and try to rebuild something when a committee has gotten together or when two people have gotten together. In the life of a number of congregations this is the role of a pastor--to pick up and to re-mold and to re-fashion and to re-direct. Whenever you have people, one must always reckon with the results of interaction.

When people get together, they can live on any one of a number of different bases; and the basis of greed, hatred, envy, jealousy, pride---how much hell has been let loose on this world because there has been such a thing as pride, raising its ugly head between people and between nations. If at this particular moment in our history, we must concern ourselves with such a thing which we reserved only to the Orientals for a long period of time---such a thing as 'saving face'....and how much



damage, almost irreparable damage, because the interaction between nations and peoples is based upon this thing or upon that thing.

Jesus Christ said, "In this new age the only real guide and rule should be this principle of love. Whatever happens between people, let it happen because they love one another.".....and then as though they had to understand perfectly and completely, He gave them this kind of a bombshell.....

.....and this matter of love means loving not only those who are good and gracious.....

.....not only those who will befriend you.....

.....not only for whom it works to your advantage if you love them.....

.....but you are to love people who are your enemies! --people who have hurt you, not helped you---people who have worked against you, not with you...."

Maybe this is one reason why God's new age has been so slow in coming--maybe this is one reason why it hadn't made as much progress in your life and in my life as it should....because we're not so sure that we want to operate the world on the principle laid down by the Creator--we'd much rather trust our own wisdom.

....love your enemies?.....do good to them that despitefully use you?....help people who can't possibly do anything for you in return? This is the basic principle for God's New Age.

Maybe it's because we don't understand what He means by that word 'love'. Love is the most abused word in the English language. We're poverty-stricken in our vocabulary. We only have one word for 'love'. In the Old World there were three words for love. There's the word eros which means you love someone as long as you can use that person to your advantage....you love someone because in loving that person you can always be taking and grabbing and getting. This isn't the kind of love that Jesus was talking about....and Jesus doesn't say, "You love your enemies because

it's to your advantage to love them." Jesus doesn't say you love anyone because it's to your advantage to love them.

There's another word for love - philein. It means to be kindly disposed toward people who are kindly disposed toward you.....a brother-sister relationship-- a relationship that exists on the basis, a mutual thing..."I give you so much---- hoping perhaps I can take so much".....a give-and-take proposition...."you serve my end--I serve your end, and we get along very happily together." Jesus was not talking about this kind of love. Jesus never reasoned that you and I deal with each other simply because in the end the nest that we feather will hold us in good stead.

Jesus was talking about agape--the Greeks had this wonderful word for it. Jesus was talking about the kind of love that you show toward someone who can't possibly do a thing for you in return. Jesus was talking about the kind of love which is activated good will.....the kind of love which enables you to be beneficently-minded toward a person--always working for that person's good. This is the kind of love that Jesus lays down as the operating principle in this world.

And this is where you and I precisely bog down.....

.....we can love people as long as we can take from them

.....we can love people as long as there might be the principle of 'give-and-take'

.....but to love people where there's no taking at all, but all

giving.....now you're talking about something that's out of this world!

Jack Miner was a fabulous person. He knew a great measure of delight in banding birds. He lived in Canada.....he'd send them out, and then he'd classify all the information that came back, and he passed this information along to the scientific world. His results were amazing.

Jack Miner happened to be a Christian....and he thought to himself--instead

of just putting pertinent data on this band, why not somehow put a verse on the band if it's at all possible--some word or two from the Good Book. Well he began doing that as well.....and these results were absolutely spectacular. An Eskimo sent him a letter, saying that he had received one of his birds, he had found the band--he was a missionary.....and when a company of his people who were there when the bird descended from the heaven and they took the band--unlearned people as they were, they flocked to this man who could read, and they begged him to tell them...."What does it say? What is this word to us that's out of this world?"

And the Eskimo missionary said...."Love one another'...!Love one another!"

It is the message that's out of this world...for the simple reason that you and I are too close to this world ever to get it any other way. We live forever horizontally, and we fail to recognize the value of the vertical approach. )

God said...."The new age will never, never come to pass until you begin to love one another as I love you. The change in your life is never going to come to pass until you begin to take God's operating principle. Ever since the dawn of this world we've tried to run it on our own basis.....

.....and God stands in the shadow---even shouting down from a lonely hill, where if you looked, you can see the outline of a cross.....

.....and the only word that God continues to call out to you and to me...

"Love....."Love"....."Love one another!"

Some of us have lived long enough to find perhaps one person, two people, who have taken Him at His word....and have proven to us that it can be done!

\* \* \* \*

June 18, 1961

"THE MARKS OF MATURITY"

It was last year about this time when the sermon schedule for the year 1960-61 was being formulated. Then it was my intention that for the most part the sermons in Saint Luke Church this year would be based upon passages from the Gospel according to Luke. Today's sermon is the next to the last in that schedule. It bears the title, "The Marks of Maturity," and the text, the closing verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man".

This, by the way, is the only Biblical account that we have of what happened to Jesus when He returned from Jerusalem to Nazareth and stayed there throughout the period of adolescence and young adulthood. We hear no more about Him until He emerges as the Itinerant Preacher, having been baptized, and goes His way to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom. All that happened from the time that He was twelve years of age until thirty is summed up magnificently in the words of the text...."And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man."

Every now and then you and I come upon someone whom we haven't seen for a period of years, perhaps since they were fifteen, and now we meet them when they're twenty-five....and we say--"My, how you've grown! I could hardly believe that you have become the person that you have."

It can happen in a period less than that. Many a parent who has sent his son away to college, perhaps a thousand miles away, sees him in September, and then he's home between semesters.....and in that brief period of several months there has been growth, there has been development.....and alas and alack, if the parent would have to say--"You've changed, my son, and not for the best." Fortunate indeed is that person who can get a light in his eyes when he sees someone whom he

hasn't seen for a while, and is delightfully pleased with the growth and the development---the sure and certain evidence of maturity which has been taking place.

This is the kind of thing which would have happened to us, had we seen Jesus of Nazareth five, ten, fifteen years after He retired to that little village, for He would have shown certain signs of maturity, and the Bible writer has no other alternative but to put it this way..."And he increased in wisdom, stature, in favor with God and with man." His became the full-orbed life. He grew into perfect manhood.

(One of the things that I remember with the greatest of profit from my days at Nawakwa, thirty years ago, was the fact that after we had been there for two weeks, and the day when we were to leave camp, each of us was given an evaluation sheet, about the half of an 8 1/2 x 11 page.....and then on that Sunday afternoon we were charged with this responsibility--each man, each camper, to go by himself, out under a tree or on a rock, and then to spend at least 3/4 of an hour to contemplate the evaluation that had been given to him. Now during that entire two-week period at Nawakwa we were being surveyed and evaluated and analyzed--not to our knowledge, of course--by our teachers, our counsellors and the camp director. The analysis, the evaluation, was vivid and graphic. The greater part of the page was given to the formation of a square....and at each point---

MENTAL

PHYSICAL

SOCIAL

SPIRITUAL

....and somewhere on the page, the text:

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man."

....and on the basis of our two weeks in camp, some kindly considerate soul tried to give us a picture of ourselves, as they had come to know us.

Now in this case, oddly enough, the perfect personality was a square!....and we'd be a bit troubled if we'd be a bit lop-sided on any one of those points--short on the social--long on the physical--short on the mental.....and because we were

at Nawakwa, we wondered how our spiritual sensitivity would register with those who were being closely associated with us.

Of all the things for which I would continue to consider myself in debt to Nawakwa, none is greater than this---to be introduced to the fact that maturity is a Christian characteristic...and that as a Christian I was meant to grow in all four directions.....and that perchance if I were to become less in one direction than in the other, I could become less than a mature Christian; that in the sight of God I was meant to become mature---physically, socially, spiritually and mentally .....and the guide was always the fact that Jesus Christ matured--grew up--in each of these directions. )

Now with the coming of the last day of school, in company with most of the families of this parish, the Parsonage family will be looking forward to a few days of vacation....and in company with most of you, we would welcome the opportunity of going back to familiar places, renew acquaintances, having several weeks of rest and relaxation. But a vacation, I submit to you this morning, is never to be simply a change from the every-day routine. A vacation that serves its proper place is something over and beyond that....an occasion for the renewal of the mind...an occasion for the restoring of the spirit; and I, for one, will be looking forward to a rare occasion when, under the cover of darkness, I'll lie down with my back against the sod and gaze up into a star-studded sky....and I shall ask questions--in the shadow of these eternal hills.....

.....what is life all about?

.....honestly now, who am I? and since I was here a year

ago, what kind of a person have I become?

....in what direction is my life going right now?

...this is the kind of a question that a man ought to ask himself every now and then. And if a vacation can serve any useful purpose, it could be along this line--that he

"The Marks of Maturity" - (4)

might have a moment of reflection, when away from his busy routine, he takes time to look at himself---to get something of the image that he himself is fashioning against a greater philosophy of life itself....

...and so I shall ask myself that question--

....am I maturing? ....am I growing up?

...a question that should

properly be asked even at 46! ...for in the Christian context, a man should always be growing.

Alas and alack, for many of us in this contemporary age, when we reach 40 we are inclined to stop growing. For a number of people that I know, they go into their fourth decade of life taking with them all the pre-conceived notions of the other periods of their lives....and some of us know very well people who have had no new thoughts, once they become 40--their lives have stopped growing.

An uncomfortable question could be this, if I were to raise it for you-- whatever your age may be, but more particularly if you're beyond 40 and 50: how many new friends have you made in the past year? They used to speak about a woman who lived on the fashionable Fifth Avenue several decades ago--that she had not added one new name to her social register in the last twenty years. For some folks, life becomes a closed corporation, and stops.

For the Christian, my friend, growth is to be expected. This is one of the characteristics of the Christian life---growth. And because we believe it as much as we do, we go on saying that we will never achieve fulfillment until we die--- that even Heaven itself is a continuation of life .... and what is life but growth and development? ..... "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man."

I don't know who said it, but it's a quotation I hope I shan't forget, and most certainly I hope I won't ignore it.....

"There is no sense in trying to mature, or in urging others to mature, if we feel that in growing from childhood to adulthood we are moving toward anti-

climax." "We need to create for ourselves a new and far more enticing image of adulthood."

It was William Sheldon who said:

"The days of youth teem with fragments of living knowledge; with daring philosophies; morning dreams; plans. But the human mind at forty is commonly vulgar, smug, deadened, (complacent) and wastes its hours. Everywhere adult brains seem to resemble blighted trees that have died in the upper branches, but yet cling to a struggling green wisp of life about the lower trunk."

If you want to assess for yourself whether or not you are maturing, whatever your age may be, and especially now as an adult, may I suggest at least three criteria:

The one is....if your heart continues to remain unselfish. A child is the most selfish person I have ever known. A child always wants. A child is always asking, begging. A child thinks that its world depends completely upon its own personality. One of the marks of maturity is growing out of childhood, becoming an adolescent and an adult; and one of the things that happens when we begin to grow is to recognize the fact that there are other people in this world, and other people have their needs, and other people have their just rights.....I am not the only person.

....how mature have you become?

....how earnestly do you recognize the rights, the desires, the needs of other people?

...it was a wise pastor who gave advice to the young man going into the ministry, and I think he must have had this very thing in mind when he said---"Don't be alarmed when you discover for yourself that you will have children of all ages in your congregation!" .....children of all ages.

Dr. Hoover told me once about a congregation in Pennsylvania that split right down the center because one woman thought a certain something should belong in the



nave at one particular place, and it didn't belong anywhere else. How childish can we become! The crowning glory of many a congregation is when its people become mature, and don't want their own ways.

Another mark of maturity: when you are possessed by a responsible mind; when you recognize the fact that you yourself can be responsible for a situation, either because it is as it is, or because it can become better. It was a precious soul in this congregation who came to me and said, "Pastor, I find myself becoming triumphant!--it's been possible for me to lick that problem of my mother-in-law. I shall not allow her to dislike me, and if she does, I shall not dislike her!"

This is what it means to have a responsible mind---to recognize that it takes two to create a situation where two people are unhappy. If this person does not like me and I do not like her, and I go on that basis, then there are two people practicing dislike. But if she goes on disliking me and I learn not to dislike her (maybe I cannot like her, but if I learn not to dislike her, and there is a difference) -- this is what it means to have a responsible mind. This is a mark of maturity.

And the third mark of maturity is to be possessed by a victorious spirit.... to recognize the fact that life never works out perfectly for anyone...to recognize the fact that again and again, and perhaps all too often than what I would prefer, life may give to me the dirty end of the stick....but by the Grace of God I shall rise above it.....to be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The mature person is the truly victorious one in spirit. Life will never work out to your liking. Some of us have to learn it the hard way, and some of us never learn it....until we became at least 40.....but by the Grace of God, to believe--over and above and beyond the stress and strain of life, there is the victory of the spirit. There's no question in my mind that some of you, if you had an entirely different situation than you have right now, you could be a lot

"The Marks of Maturity" - (7)

happier than you are.....but I am equally certain that you could never have become the mature person that you are--because you've tried to be more than equal to the situation.

Maturity is a Christian characteristic. And now I say it parenthetically.... you can tell whether you're mature, when you're able to recognize immaturity in other people.....

....you can tell when you're mature, if you are fortunate enough, by the Grace of God, to recognize any sign of immaturity in yourself.....

A noted student of human nature said...

"The tragedy of mankind has always been that we've never had enough people who have grown up."

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"GOD'S USE OF THE INCIDENTAL"

It was a year ago this month when this sermon series schedule in Saint Luke Church was projected, for which this sermon at this time is the last. Just this past week the sermon schedule for September to June, 1962 has been scheduled. The series for next year will be based upon studies from the Acts of the Apostles. Perchance during the relaxed summer weeks you may use the book of the Acts of the Apostles in your devotions and even in this way better prepare yourselves for the sermons to be preached in Saint Luke Church, September through June, 1962.

This morning's sermon bears the title, "God's Use of the Incidental." The text is the 14th verse of the 17th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And, as they went, they were cleansed."

Some of my best friends are physicians. And one of the happiest experiences that I have known in the ministry was perhaps a dozen years ago, when I was able to meet once a week with a small group of men. We represented different walks of life... ..and in that group was a very fine dedicated Christian physician. And week by week when we came together, never giving any decidedly religious flavor to our meeting--each of us in his own way would use the rest of us as a sounding board--to gripe, if you please! ...to lay bare his soul about the things that rested heavily.

One day the physician took over. He said, "If you don't mind, I'd like to complain. I can't do it everywhere I go, but I trust this circle. There are some things in life that I find most annoying and irritating. Every now and then I have to face a patient whose body is vexed with a disease or an ailment or an infection, and I'm not quite equal to it. I'm not so sure that I know exactly what I ought to do. Now this irritates me and annoys me to a degree--of course it does....and then

~~at~~ at once.....

....."Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us!

..."We've heard all about you, Jesus....we know that you perform miracles. If you're a miracle-worker, here we are! Do something now."

But the Scripture lesson says it didn't happen that way....for the simple reason that God doesn't always jump as soon as you and I call upon His name. And this is where a lot of our thinking, no matter how well-meaning it may be, <sup>is</sup> ~~isn't~~ absolutely fallacious---how we got that way, I'm not quite certain, but some of us have a way of thinking that God has to go to work at once.....

.....do something dramatic

....specific

.....as soon as we begin to pray--even though we haven't prayed for a long, long time.

.....Well the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ doesn't jump every time you and I call upon His name.)

In the Chapel of the Grateful Heart the windows depict a theme of gratitude. Each window is based upon a grateful soul from the Gospel according to Luke. And the first window that you see when you enter the Chapel of the Grateful Heart is the character who is portrayed in this passage of Scripture as the grateful Samaritan leper. He was the one, you remember, who, out of ten, came back to say "thank you" to the Man who cleansed him. Whenever I go into the Chapel of the Grateful Heart I try to take a moment or two, if at all possible, to take another good long look at that man. How did it happen that he was the one who came back to say "thank you" -- when the other nine were also recipients of God's favor? In the preparation

"God's Use of the Incidental" (2)

among the people that I meet--all too frequently the patient who has waited too long until he has come to see me....."

But he said, "By your leave, what gets me most, and I have no other way of putting it than this---is the impatience of my patients, and I rue the day that they ever coined the word 'miracle-' or 'wonder-drug.' They come to me, I prescribe, and even before they get the prescription from the pharmacist, they expect to feel better immediately. And it doesn't always happen--in fact it seldom happens that way."

Human nature is, by the very character of the human being, I suppose, an impatient thing. We've always been impatient, more or less, but in recent years perhaps a little more so, because ours is the "instant" age. Ever since you've been able to put hot water into a cup and put in some coffee and have instant coffee--we've allowed the psychology to carry over into a number of other things. Maybe it goes back so far to the time when the man first flicked a switch, and a room was changed from total darkness into light.....and it goes on.....what is it--58 minutes by jet, from Friendship Airport to Chicago?.....we have a way of thinking that things almost have to happen immediately--in no time at all, more so now than before.)

But it was always present in man. (In studying the passage of Scripture which serves as the basis for this sermon, we recognize that once upon a time there were ten men, who were lepers, who came to Jesus Christ to be cleansed; and of all things, when you read the passage of Scripture, you discover that He did not cleanse them immediately. No miracle was worked on the spot. It was only "as they went" that they were cleansed. God saw fit to work quite incidentally--not directly, not immediately.

This, my friend, I submit to you, is one of the first lessons that you and I have to master in our relationship with God. It might have been that these lepers came to Jesus, having heard all about Him, and that they expected Him to do something

"God's Use of the Incidental" (4)

of this sermon I have received insights that I did not have before...I think one reason lies in the fact that he alone was perceptible to God at work indidentally. The other nine expected God to work dramatically....directly....immediately.....and He didn't.

And that's way, when they were on their way, going to do something else, they might have been disappointed and disillusioned....they might have felt--"Well, we'll go show ourselves to the priest, because we've tried everything else--we might as well try this".....but only one out of ten happened to be the kind of person who believed that God could be at work in some other way than immediate direct action .....and as he was on his way, his eyes were opened to the fact that the cleansing process was at work.....

.....as he was on his way, he was being cleansed

.....God was at work in his life as he was walking.....and he was made aware of it.

Now this is one of the lessons that you and I have to master in our relationship with God. There are times when He works very dramatically---there are times when He will work immediately.....suddenlly.....specifically. But God does not limit His action, directly. He works, sometimes, quite incidentally, for the simple reason that God is always at work. He is never idle.

Did it ever occur to you that the finest and best friend that you have, you met quite incidentally, as you were engaged in something else. It could be that true for you. I honestly don't believe that any of us ever gets up in the morning and says to himself, "Now today--today, God, I'm going to meet one person at least, who will be for me the most wonderful person I could ever know--it's going to happen today, God. I'm going to make it my business to see that it does." Now, it doesn't really happen that way, does it?

Many of the wonderful things that happen to us in life, happen quite incident-

ally, as we are engaged in something else. For the very same reason that sometimes the influence for good that you have upon other people doesn't happen because you happen to say to yourself, "Now today, God, I shall meet such-and-such a person, and when I meet that person, I shall cause to register upon that person the total impact of my life...and all that I am and all that I would be will register, immediately, and directly." Why, even when we go to seek out our friends for their advice and counsel in a critical moment in our life---even when we go to see them, whatever good they are able to give to us doesn't lie in the relationship that we have with them in that precise moment; but rather, we accept their advice and their counsel because throughout the years we've had an association with them, and whatever good may come to us when we need it most, could be primarily the accumulation of the incidental. That's one reason why I think a man who stays in a pastorate for at least five or six years has a decided advantage over the man who is only with a congregation two or three years. His value, if you please, is accumulative---with an on-going relationship with his people---seeing them in a variety of conditions and circumstances and situations. There may be the occasional moment when whatever God has given him may work for good in the life of somebody else---is effective because prior to that there had been the accumulation of all the incidental relationships.

( I warn you, my friend, that word "incidental" is not synonymous with "accidental". God never allows anything to happen to us "accidentally." God is simply the kind of God who has a kind of economy....so that all things work together for good, wherever we may be. This sermon has a very practical intention. For those of you who know sorrow, where the burden of life is grievous to bear, and you've made your prayers, and you wait for God to do something immediately and directly.....I will have to say to you---God doesn't always work immediately and directly. In fact, I must tell you that, more often than not, He works incidentally---in the on-going process--in the con-

tinuing relationships that life exacts and demands. God works in and through these things.

To those of you who know a moment of crisis, a disappointment here in someone that you love, a frustration with a job that you have, you may make your prayer, and you may want God to do something by tomorrow morning at 10:00 o'clock....God just doesn't limit Himself to a 10:00 o'clock schedule. Life doesn't wait until our prayers are answered. Life is always there at the door with its continuing demands...

.....there was this trip that had to be made on the part of these lepers

from Jesus to the priest...it was a road that had to be walked

.....there were familiar places that had to be covered again

.....there were certain people who had to be faced.....

Jesus said, "Get out there and go".....and as they went, the cleansing process took place.....God at work in the things that are happening to us incidentally along the way of life. With my whole heart I believe this.

And I don't know that I could love and serve a God who limited Himself to certain hours.....

.....I don't know that I could believe in a God very fervently if I knew He was only a 9:30 God on a Sunday morning---if this should be the only place where He could become real to me.....God has a way of working always and incidentally.

It was a very distinguished preacher who tells the story about a young woman who attended a meeting that he had conducted, and by the grace of God, she was converted. She wanted to have done with all that so easily beset her. She wanted to become a much finer person. She made her profession in Christ.

After six weeks she came back. She asked to see the preacher under whom she had been converted. She said, of all things....."It doesn't work!" <sup>Because, it doesn't work.</sup> I'm inclined to give it all up. I still have my temper.....and there are still people that I don't like....and I don't always have a spring in my step and a light in my eyes....



...and I'm not always glad that I'm a Christian---it's a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. It doesn't work!"

I wish I could tell you what the pastor said to her---I don't know. I only know that after his conversation with her was ended and she left his study, this pastor reports that within a half-hour or fifteen minutes he had another caller. It was a man who came and said, "Pastor, I want to make a thank-offering. Here is a gift of \$25.00. My daughter was converted in your church six weeks ago, and my wife and I, her mother, are very grateful for the change that's taking place. We can see a little bit of it---it's accumulative, not always as perceptible as we would like, but there is a difference." The pastor's previous caller, the girl, their daughter. God was at work in her life.....a change was taking place. It was happening incidentally.....but there were those who had eyes to perceive the grace of God.

That's why I say to you---those nine who did not come back to thank Jesus must have been nine people who failed to recognize the wonderful truth that God's work can happen incidentally in life---not necessarily specifically....directly....  
...or immediately.

This sermon could stop here, but it doesn't. If you want God to be at work in your life always and everywhere, and now primarily through the incidental, then you and I are in duty bound to become the kind of person who is willing to obey Him--obey Him day by day, even though the results are not nearly as sudden as we would like. It was only "as they went"---only as they continued in obedience....that the cleansing process was made effective in their life.

Beloved, God wants to be at work in your life every day, not only precise moments. Let Him be at work in your life in all that happens incidentally as it may occur, but be the kind of person who, by the grace of God, can be perceptive to what God is doing. It can save you from despair, not only for your own life, but for what's happening in the lives of other people as well.

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen  
The Tenth Sunday After Trinity  
(The Transfiguration of Our Lord)

August 6, 1961

#### ON THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP

The text is written in the 23rd verse of the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"If any man would come after me, let him  
deny himself and take up his cross daily  
and follow me."

Have you ever been haunted by a passage of Scripture? You are fortunate indeed if this should be true, for the longer you think about certain passages of Scripture, the clearer their truths become. I should like to think that this is true for this passage that compels me to speak to you this morning. Since I last stood at this sacred desk I have found these words of my Lord coming back ever so frequently.

It is well that this should be the text, for a vacation should serve this purpose, that it should give a man an opportunity to re-assess himself and his preaching. And I have asked myself this question on more than one occasion these past four weeks: Have I made it very plain to you, the people of this congregation, just what is involved in discipleship? What does it mean to be a Christian? No wonder this text haunts me, for the text gives the answer.....

"If any man will come after me, let him deny  
himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

First of all, it ought to be said that not everyone becomes a Christian. Jesus Christ may confront each of us, but just because you've been confronted, it doesn't follow that automatically we become followers of Jesus Christ. That preposition "if" is a mighty significant thing....."if any man will come after me"....."if any man will be my disciple".....he can always say "no."

## On The Meaning of Discipleship (2)

This week at our Choir Camp, in a discussion that I had with the entire group the last day we were in camp, I found myself necessarily reminding the boys and girls that, while they are Christian, they may permit themselves to think, on occasion, that everyone else is Christian, too. Oddly enough, I grew up in a small town of about three thousand people; and in those formative years of my life, as I recall them now, I think almost every person who lived in that town had some kind of relationship with one of the five churches---a strange thing to be true. Against that background, I remember how shocked I was to discover that not everyone's a Christian!....not everyone's a member of a church! .....and then in recent years to learn that Christians are decidedly in the minority! --just as some people are shocked to discover that there are more colored people in the world---black, or whatever shade you may name--than white!....that white people are in the minority! It's a shock to some people to discover that while they follow Jesus Christ, they, too, are in the minority. Jesus says, "I will confront you...I will lay down the challenge. I give you an opportunity to decide---will you, or won't you?"

Now this leads me to share with you three very simple truths concerning the Christian religion, dealing with the fact of discipleship. The first is this: It must always be a matter of decision. No one ever accidentally, casually, becomes a follower of Jesus Christ. It's always a matter of decision. A man has to make up his mind!.....and Jesus waits----"Will you?...or won't you?"

This is an awkward truth to share with you, but I'm constrained to do it. Sometimes I'm convinced that we who grow up in the Christian culture, in the Christian environment, even within the Christian church, do not fully appreciate the significance of the fact that discipleship involves personal decision. It may be a good thing that you and I are here right now because we had parents who subscribed

### On The Meaning of Discipleship (3)

to the Christian religion, and the older we become, the more we will appreciate the stock from which we have stemmed....but there are some of us who, because this happens to be true, cannot fully appreciate that true discipleship is always a matter of personal decision. Somewhere along the line, you and I must, in our own name--not in the name of our parents, Sunday School teacher, pastor or deaconess, neighbor or friend.....in our own name we have to decide for Jesus Christ.

( I have told you that I envy people who are gifted with brush and pigment--who can take an idea and a truth and transport it--convey it, on canvas. I always wished that I could. And I think if I had that gift, one of the first paintings that I would want to have, done by my own brush, would be a concept of heaven..and it would be a gate, narrow enough for only one person to enter at a time....and then somewhere in the picture I would have people standing and waiting....and maybe I'd have a caption for it: "Moment of Decision" ..... will I, or won't I? ..should I, or should I not?

I'd have a sequel for that painting--it wouldn't be ~~an~~ a picture, now, of the gate of heaven alone, but it would be a portrayal of the truth that somewhere in that person's life, even before he got to the gate of heaven, he had been confronted by Jesus Christ, and this, too, would be a Moment of Decision ....will I, or won't I? )

As I have searched my heart these past weeks, so I invite you to search yours. In this whole matter of discipleship, is there in clear focus for me a time of decision, when clearly and most certainly I have said 'yes' to Jesus Christ? Now that leads me to say to you that if this should be true, don't be disturbed if you haven't shown too great an improvement since the time that you said 'yes' to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does not ask people to say 'yes' to Him if they have the understanding that they immediately become perfect people. A follower of Jesus Christ remains an imperfect person, even to the very day he dies.

#### On The Meaning of Discipleship (4)

(And what you will do with this truth I don't know, but even those who classify themselves as being saved remain sinners to the very gate of Paradise. Who is a saint? A saint is a sinner & who is in the process of being saved.....and if you're in the process of being saved, it goes without saying that you remain an imperfect person.....

...."If any man will come after me.....if any man will make up his mind to follow me---he may stumble, he may fall, he may fall..  
....I only ask that he look in my direction....I only ask that every time he falls, he turns his face toward me, and that the next step should be taken toward me." )

That leads to a second very simple truth: in this whole matter of Christian discipleship, there is the moment of decision which leads to a difficult assignment. "If any man will come after me," says Jesus Christ, "let him take up his cross--let him deny himself." Would you believe me if I were to tell you that there's something very, very wrong with your Christian religion if it's an easy thing? --if there is no strain? --if there is no burden?....of course I have to say it---if there is no cross? .....you don't have Christianity--you just haven't met Jesus Christ! Whenever you meet Jesus Christ, you're bound to come face to face with a man who is carrying a cross.....and Jesus Christ says, "If any man comes after me, let him expect to do the same thing."

This is one way I can put it for you: tomorrow morning, when you go to your office, will it really be a difficult thing to be as Christian tomorrow morning as you think you are right now?.....

....this afternoon, perchance, will you find it an easy thing to be Christ-like to someone in your own family? --not in Africa --not in China --not in some distant city ....within the confines of your own family circle! will you find it an easy thing to treat them the way you want Jesus Christ to treat you?

On The Meaning of Discipleship (5)

...you teenagers, confirmed in the Christian faith--so-called followers of the Lord Jesus Christ....if you find it hard to say 'no' take heart, my friend--you know what it means to be a Christian. It means you're out there where it's going to count....and there can be no valid following of Jesus Christ unless somewhere along the line you're constantly saying 'no' to anything that's less than Jesus Christ.

This is a very plain sermon, a very simple sermon, dealing with three simple truths.....

....you can be no disciple without decision

....you cannot remain a disciple unless you find it a difficult thing.....

There are those who take the Christian church to task and they say that we've sold the world short! We've made it too easy for people to become Christian! There's a figure of speech that I can't quite have done with.....it says every church should be a church of the high threshold....meaning that it ought to require a little bit of effort to become a member, and to remain a member, and to be an earnest follower of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ did not say in this challenge that He gave the people what the nature of the cross would be, what the nature of the burden would be. He simply says you'll have to pay a price. You know very well, some of you more so than others, that one of the great responsibilities of a pastor, if he's worth his salt at all, is to prove himself the kind of person to whom people will come when they have a problem; and when they do come, if he's going to be true to his Lord at all, he's in duty bound to show them that in the face of their problem they have no alternative ---they have to react as Jesus Christ would have them react....and I'm amazed, forever being amazed, when I meet with so-called Christian people who have permitted themselves to think that in this battle of life, and particularly in the kind of

## On The Meaning of Discipleship (6)

engagement which confronts them, that there can be any other way out, except a kind of suffering on their part.

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross"  
....and now the third truth of Christian discipleship, one almost as hard to believe as the second.....

"If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross, let him deny himself daily"

.....you mean, Jesus, every day of my life I have to follow you? That's precisely what He said.

We have a variety of Christians.....

.....once-ever-so-often kind

.....another kind, when it's convenient, when it's easy

.....another kind, when I'm inspired, when someone buoys me up

.....another kind, when, by the nature of the circumstances, I'm

compelled.....

Jesus said, "No matter what the circumstances may be, if you sign up with me....

.....every day.....

.....every day.....

every day.....I make no provision for absenteeism".

It's a day-in, day-out affair, once I become a Christian.

The older we become, sometimes we look back and recall things that happened to us in our teenage period. We didn't quite appreciate them then. They have a different kind of light now. There is the day when Blanche said to me, as we passed the Domestic Science, the Home Arts department in the high school, "Did you notice those doughnuts, freshly made? There isn't a single person in the room. Would you go in and get one?" I'm ashamed to tell you my answer. To this day I often wonder

what brand of Christianity she thought I had, that for one moment, I could deviate from a manner of commitment---that just for one doughnut, I could take a holiday from Christ! God be thanked that I didn't! And perhaps there are reasons, not of my own making, that I hadn't. Would it be as simple as all that?

(Can you easily forget Harry Emerson Fosdick's story about the Armenian nurse who suffered during the Turkish atrocities...and how the slightest inattention on her part could have spelled certain death for a man who defiled her....but she nursed him to health, and when he saw her and recognized her....."Why did you do it?" , she said, "I am a follower of Jesus Christ."

.....suppose she would have said, "Lord, not today!....not today!

Sunday, maybe, with all those decent people who go to worship....

...tomorrow, with all those people who will be pleasant and kind and pity me....but not right now! ....not today!"

When you sign up for Jesus Christ, He says, "This is all the way---all the time."

(With purpose, and deliberate intent, I did not give you the introductory words to the text---I have saved them, now, for the concluding part of the sermon. The introductory word to the text is this:

"And he said to all of them, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me"

.....and he said to all of them. There is no set of standards for discipleship for preachers and deaconesses and church councilmen, and another set of standards for everybody else.....there is no set of standards for people who grow up within the Christian context, and another set of standards for those who have never heard of Jesus Christ. The set of standards remains the same for <sup>Jesus</sup> any ~~man~~, whatever the path may be that he <sup>or she</sup> has taken to the precise moment of decision....

"And He said to all of them, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."



On The Meaning of Discipleship (8)

(As God gives me grace, as God gives me wisdom, as long as I come back to this sacred desk, I pray with all my heart.....these high standards will be echoed and re-echoed in every truth that's proclaimed....and that, sermon by sermon, if, by the pleasure of God, there could be for any one of you a moment of decision, and you should commit yourself to Jesus Christ, then I will not have short-changed Him, nor you.)

\* \* \*

(The text is written as the 17th verse of the 5th chapter of Paul's Second Letter to the Christians at Corinth:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature - - "

Quite honestly, if you were reading that now for yourself, you ought to say, "I had better read that again," for this is Paul's definition of a Christian, and it's a far cry from what you and I usually think of when we think of a person as a Christian. J. B. Phillips has a very striking translation of this text. He says: "If any man is in Christ, he becomes <sup>brand</sup> a new person altogether."

When people become members of the Christian church today, some of them say to their pastor, "Pastor, I'm willing to become a member of your church, but don't expect too much from me." This is not Paul's type of Christian. Paul expected a great deal from any person who became a Christian, in fact he expected a transformation---a complete change in a person's life. Now is this what you think of when you think of a person as a Christian?....a person to whom something has happened?.....a person who is entirely different than what he was before he encountered Jesus Christ? )

Let me say to you quite candidly, that the name 'Christian' is used by a variety of people, and each with some degree of justification. Like the proverbial 57 varieties, there could be 57 different brands bearing the Christian name. They are a type. Let me deal with four types right now.

There is a type of person who takes the name Christian, who takes the name because he inherited the name. He was born into a Christian family. As his father and mother were Christian before him, so he has become a Christian. This is not the easiest thing in the world for me to say, but he is the person who has become

Christian more by chance than by choice. He is a type of person who, if you please, if his parents had been Jewish, he would embrace Judaism with the same degree of ardor and enthusiasm, or lack of it, as he embraces the Christian religion. He is what he is because this is what he happened to have been born into.

There are many people who take the name of Christian who fall in that category--they are Christian by inheritance. And I wouldn't for the moment short-change this kind of contribution that's made to the Christian church. The older I become, the more I recognize the debt that we owe to those who have introduced us, by virtue of physical birth, into a Christian setting, into a Christian home. The older some of us become, the more we thank God that we had a father and a mother who were not strangers to Jesus Christ.

Once there was a young man about to leave home, and as he was about to face a new world, he said to his father, "Have you a bit of advice to give me?"

"Simply this, my son, wherever you go, whatever you may do, always remember that you are a Brown. That name 'Brown' means something in this community; for generation after generation we've made an impact upon the people of our community. There are some things in our town that would never have been done by a Brown. People know that. We set a high standard for ourselves. My son, wherever you go, remember that you are a Brown. You, Roger Brown, you have generation after generation behind you. Be true to your inheritance."

Maybe we Christians ought to stop and think that way occasionally, too--that we do have an inheritance, and there's something to be said for it. But the thing that disturbs me at the moment with the person who is Christian by inheritance, and Christian by inheritance only, is this: that all too frequently he is prone to live off the religious capital of his parents--he coasts along on the standards which they have maintained and the reputation which they have established. But a man

can't go on forever living off of the capital of somebody else. It has a way of running out. (Someone has wisely observed that Christianity must be re-invested every single generation---it can last for only one generation at a time. And if you and I do not share with those who claim our name something of Jesus Christ, the next generation most certainly will suffer.)

Well, there is a kind of person who is a Christian by way of inheritance, a Christian by name only. And one could become exited about that kind of Christianity if it weren't for the fact that it does become Christianity by chance, more so than by choice. But it exists.

Then there is the type of person who is a Christian because he subscribes to the culture which is the impact of the Christian religion upon generation after generation. The Christian religion has done something to the order of society. She has made her distinctive contribution to the arts. The world is a finer place because of the Christian religion.

A friend of mine has just returned from Europe. He has a measure of delight as he remembers the cathedrals that he visited--what magnificent works of art!.....

.....he has something to say about the opera that he attended

....the paintings that he looked at.....tremendously impressed by the culture that remains today of Christian society.

And there are people in America who subscribe to the Christian religion because, they say quite candidly,

"The Christian religion has made this old world of ours a far more decent place in which to live...and, therefore, I'll become a Christian.....I will subscribe to its culture."

There are some people who become Christian because their life has not turned out exactly as they had hoped it would. With all the pressures of life coming in upon them, they've known one anxiety and one frustration after another. Their own

resources are not adequate. Someone has said, "Well, why not try God?"

And rather facetiously, let us hope not, someone observed, he knew a man who said, "I've tried everything else. I might just as well give God a twirl. Everything else has failed. Now, God, you can have a chance with my life."

(There are some people who become Christian because they've experimented with God, just as they have dabbled with a number of different other things in life. On occasion there are some friends who send to me little booklets and pamphlets about people who have come to God because everything else has failed. They're quite <sup>excited</sup> over this---to think that here is somebody who has found God when everything else has turned out, not as well as he had hoped; so now, almost with a gambler's luck, or with a gambler's decision.....

"I'll take a chance on God."

My greatest quarrel is this: that when people do this kind of thing, they do it because they want to get something out of God....

"Nothing else has quite satisfied me....nothing else has given me a return....now, God, I'll turn to you--see what you can do for me."

You never really know God if you only intend to exploit Him and to see what you can get out of Him. Whether you are aware of it or not, my friend, there is a very unfortunate trend in present-day Christianity which I hope has run its course..... a "peace of mind" cult.....where you experiment with God and you give Him a chance--just hoping that some good of it may come to you. People who live this kind of life are called Christian-by-experiment....."I'll try it once, at least."

Now don't mis-understand me. I have lived long enough to be thankful for any man who is introduced to Jesus Christ, <sup>by</sup> any way. I am profoundly grateful for any man who comes to the Christian religion, whatever his introduction may be.

(Now, let us call some things by their rightful name.....

....a person who is a Christian in name only

....a person who is a Christian because he simply subscribes  
to the culture which Christianity has made possible

....a person who is a Christian just because he's experimenting  
with God

.....is only in the introductory stage of  
the Christian religion. He is only on the fringe of it. He doesn't have what  
you might refer to as basic, valid Christianity.

.....a Christian in name only may be a Christian, but in name only.

.....a Christian who subscribes to the culture of society is one who is  
subscribing to a culture, and not to the Person of Jesus Christ.

.....a person who is experimenting with Jesus can also run the risk of  
being disappointed, if he simply wants Jesus Christ to heap up  
his basket and fill his pockets and pronto!--put a spring in  
his step!--he could be disappointed.

....but each of these might bring him a little bit closer.

The Apostle Paul says the only valid kind of Christian religion is what you  
might refer to as "experience"....not experimentation, but experience.

....the kind of thing which is an outright encounter with Jesus Christ

...the kind of thing which Paul says is in Jesus Christ.

Now, this is the finest kind of Christian religion---to have had an encounter with  
Jesus Christ...to have met Him....to commit your life to a Person--

....not to a program,

....not to a society,

....not to write off your religious experience in someone  
else's name.....

.....to be able to say, "This I know to be true, because of the testi-

mony of my heart.....I know Jesus Christ....I know whom I believe and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him.")

When a man has an encounter with Jesus Christ and has met Him face to face, then something happens, and it's always a transformation...and the man becomes a new person altogether.

There comes a time in each of our lives when we ought to sit down and ask ourselves---just how valid is my Christian religion? Am I subscribing to something which is mine only because my fathers introduced me to it?

(I have always thanked God that when my father set his face toward a new world, he wanted to come all the way to America; but I have often wondered, only by speculation, of course, what would have happened to his son, had he decided to stop off somewhere in Central Europe.....if I were the son of a man living in Central Europe, inside the Iron Curtain, what, really now, would be my Christian religion? People who live in East Berlin know it now perhaps better than anyone else in Central Europe....it can no longer be a religion of culture....it can no longer be the religion of my grandfather. Of all the people on the face of the earth to whom my heart goes out, it goes out to certain Lutheran pastors who stand by and see their own wives, because of the sake of their children, flee to the West, perhaps never again to see them. They cannot go with them. The Lutheran Church, rather rigidly, has decided no Lutheran pastor can leave the East Zone and go to the West, and continue as a pastor. The need is where he is, and if he wants to stay as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, as a minister of the Gospel, he must stay.

Those who are staying are not leaning on a religion based on culture....

Those who are staying are not staying because they are coasting along  
on the religious capital of their parents.....

They are staying because, day by day, they are rooted and grounded by Him

who is the Eternal Pilgrim and the Abiding Presence.

They are able to say, "Here I stand, yet I do not stand here alone--

Jesus Christ stands with me."

But you're not in East Berlin, my friend, Tomorrow brings its own crises where you are....your own personal confrontation with life. You may be tempted to despair, and to be anything less than what Jesus Christ would have you be, but if you want to confront life and to hold your ground, the only thing that will enable you to do it will be Jesus Christ in your heart. This is the only kind of Christian religion that stands the test of time....the religion of personal experience.

Paul said: "If any man is in Christ, he becomes a new person."

.....are you that up-to-date, my friend?

\* \* \* \*



August 20, 1961

"A PICTURE OF HEAVEN"

The sermon for today bears the title, "A Picture of Heaven"; and the text, the 9th verse of the 7th chapter of the Book of Revelation:

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;"

One of the exceedingly precious things which comes to each of us, made in the image of God, is to be able to think the thoughts of God. And no one, I dare say, has fully understood God who has not also thought about God's Kingdom in this world, and in the world to come. You cannot fully think about God without thinking about the life in the hereafter.

It's because many of us confine our thinking simply to things horizontal that we miss a great deal in many ways. (Someone has said, a distinguished church leader, by the way, that condemnation of our generation lies in the fact that we are a people for whom hell has no terror and heaven no invitation.) So glued have we become to the things of this present world that we seldom give serious thought to the world yet to come. It becomes every man who takes the name of Christ to concern himself with the Kingdom of God, with the Kingdom of Heaven. And when our Lord was here on earth, He spent a great deal of His time talking about things, when He would say....."Why, the Kingdom of God is like this----", or

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto this man...or unto  
this situation." .....

You know, of course you do, that the true painter, the artist about to convey his thought into canvas, if it's a landscape, invariably decides first upon what

## "A Picture of Heaven" (2)

the sky is going to be like; and once he determines the colors of the sky, then everything else in the painting is governed accordingly. This could be a parable for life for you and for me, that we ought to set our pace by what we get from the Heaven above. If you want to really know how to live here on earth, we should ask ourselves the question: what is it like in Heaven above? How does God govern things there?

(We are a people who could well afford to think more and more in terms of Heaven. Why were the saints called saints? Because they were people who invariably had their eyes set with affection upon the things in the world to come, and they mirrored and reflected something of the Kingdom of Heaven right here on earth. Ah, we need not fool ourselves, we could run the risk, as the old Anglican bishop did.....they used to say of him that he was so heavenly-minded that he was of no earthly good.)

We are a people who have gone in the opposite direction. We haven't even thought enough about what lies beyond. And it could be said, unfortunately, that we are a generation--not afraid to die....not afraid to die because we're not afraid of Hell....that we are a generation who have failed to appreciate that life itself on this earth is geared and determined very largely by the prospect that we hold for Heaven above. That's why, on this Sunday, I would encourage you to do some very serious thinking about Heaven. What is it like?

When our Lord was here on earth, Heaven was a very definite part of His vocabulary, and He was always talking about things in the other world, encouraging us to live here, now, in the light of Heaven's light.

Once there was an old man, a saint and a seer, confined to an island; and because he was so precious to God, God enabled him to see what few men have ever seen ....He gave him a very lasting, wonderful glimpse into Heaven. And what John saw on the Isle of Patmos he has preserved for us as we read in that most fascinating of

all books, the Book of the Revelation, something which comes to us as a true glimpse of Heaven. This text enables us to catch something of the vision that came to John when he had his picture of Heaven. Let me read the text for you again:

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;"

John, tell me what you see--you, the most fortunate of people--you, who got a glimpse into Heaven....what do you see, John?

John says, "I saw people, a multitude so great that no man could number them!"

John, did you really? that many people?

(You and I, as we deal with people day by day, wittingly or unwittingly are forever consigning people to Hell; and we could be startled if we were to take our souls to task and to discover how many we've marked off the highway of Heaven....we don't fully understand them....we only see certain things that are happening at a particular time, and they don't reflect much of the grace of Jesus Christ--at least as we see it; and we have a way of believing that there are more people going to Hell than there are people going to Heaven.

Be careful when you pass judgment on other people. As far as John was concerned, he was thrilled to discover that there were many, many people in Heaven, in fact so great a number that he couldn't even count them. This is a comforting thought, isn't it? -- to know that Heaven's going to be that thickly populated? God is the judge, you see. You and I are not the judge. When we see people fall and stumble along the highway of life, don't be too quick to count a man out. Stumble, fall, fail as he may, if when he gets up from his knees he looks in the

"A Picture of Heaven" (4)

right direction, that man might be closer to Heaven than any of us might fully realize. There are more people, I am willing to believe, nearer to the gate of Heaven than you and I have any idea.)

Says John, "Why, when I saw Heaven, it was peopled by so great a crowd that I couldn't even number them."

Beloved, this is our difficulty. We think that Heaven belongs to only those who are perfect. This is not so! If Heaven belonged only to those who were perfect, then you, my friend, and I would have no hope; and even the Good Book says, "There is none perfect, no not one".....only Jesus Christ remains the Perfect One.

(Heaven is not peopled by those who are perfect. The mark of a saint is never perfection! The mark of a saint is consecration---the desire to be numbered in the ranks of the redeemed; and it's good basic Lutheran theology, beloved, that you and I remain sinners, even to the very hour of our death. We who would be numbered among the saints are the sinners who are being saved.....and a saint is always a man who falls; and when he rises, he sets his face again toward Heaven.)

(John, what did you see when you got a glimpse into Heaven?

"I saw many, many people."

This can be comforting for you and for me. It should charge each one of us with a sense of obligation to treat everyone that we meet as though he were Heaven-bound. How different our relations could be with people, if no matter how much we may dislike them, if no matter how far they fall below the standards that you and I set for them---not for what we set for ourselves.....but yet, if we could see every man as a candidate for the road to Heaven, how differently might we treat them!)

John, what else did you see?

And John might say, "Well, when I got the thing into focus, why the people that I was able to see, they were from every nation! all colors! all classifications!"

That's the second thing that John wants you to know: all kinds of people in

Heaven. Not only many people, but all kinds. (I suppose the one word that might become many of us when we stand at the Great Gate--the one descriptive that would best tell the look on our faces, would be the word--surprise. I have good authority for that observation. Our Lord said, "In the last great day, when the time of judgment, many will come to me and say, 'Lord, when did we see you?...when did we help you?.. ..when didn't we help you?'" .....with surprise written all over their faces! They would either be inside or outside the gate---shocked to discover that could be true.)

John says, "Why the people in Heaven----all kinds!"

All kinds, my friend? Nay, not so for some of us. We hesitate to condemn, to indict ourselves, but it might be a surprise to discover how some of us have Luther-anized Heaven.....

.....how some of us have Americanized Heaven

.....how some of us have made Heaven a place for white people only!

In the old chapel of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, there is a huge painting of the Last Supper. It is, of course, of a reproduction of daVinci's Last Supper. If you know anything at all of the Pennsylvania Germans, you may be surprised to discover that these people who appear as James and John, Matthew, Andrew and Bartholemew, do not have Arabic features, but they have the features of the Pennsylvania Germans. The man who reproduced this painting saw it in the light of the people with whom he associated.

It is a parable, my friend, and you and I run the same risk, of picturing Heaven as being limited only to those with whom we associate--to those who are of our persuasion--to those who are of our likeness. This, too, comes by way of indictment to the Christian church: that all too often, in all too many places, we look too much alike!....we think too much alike!....and we allow to gravitate toward us only those of our own disposition. The only thing we ought to have in common is Jesus Christ, and

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our need for Him as a Saviour! ....and God be praised if in this church there could be diversity of spirit....

diversity of temperament.....

diversity of culture.....

but having one common bond in Jesus Christ.

Says John, "When I saw Heaven..." (and with a look of surprise on his face)

".....all kinds of people!"

If you were painting a picture of Heaven, and you were bringing the sharp relief, face after face, tell me honestly now---would you have saints in ebony?  
.....would you have a Russian? We take ourselves to task, some of us. Reports come out from the other side of the Iron Curtain that there are, few, of course---few indeed---a handful of Christian people here and a handful of Christian people there.....who against great odds are walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. If John were talking in our language today, he's say, "There is no Iron Curtain in Heaven.....nor is God color-blind!"

John, what else did you see when you saw Heaven?

"I saw people that I couldn't even number, so great was the number, but when I did get a good look at individual faces, I saw that they came from many nations ---from all over the world."

John, what else did you see?

John said, "Why the people that I saw, they were standing before the Throne---they were standing before the Lamb....they were clothed in white robes and they had palms in their hands!" And John says, "I am happy to tell you, Heaven is a place of great joy! Heaven is a place of victory! Heaven belongs to those who are made triumphant in Jesus Christ!"

My friend Jay McCoy was a good soldier for Jesus Christ. One of the rich blessings that came to me was to get to know him---a red-blooded Christian. I used to say that Jay was the type of man who had his own back door to Heaven---so

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closely did he live with Jesus Christ. And Jay loves his boys--he loved his business...but he loved his Lord more.

Jay knew that his days were numbered. They built a brand new plant. He built it for his boys. They moved in....and Jay was the last to leave the plant-- he turned the key, he went home. And that night he went home to Heaven.

A friend of mine said, "Poor old Jay!" And I said to myself quickly, and to him, "Don't you dare say 'poor old Jay'! Knowing Jay as I did, I'm quite certain that day by day he made a prayer.....

"Lord, let me live long enough to get my boys squared off....

Let me live long enough to see them firmly established,

and I'll not ask for anything else.....

Let me live long enough to see them good servants of the

Lord Jesus Christ, active in their church....."

....that's the kind of a man he was!

"Poor so-and-so, who is left behind!..." you can talk like that if you want to.....who endure the loneliness of separation.....but don't you ever call someone who is given the inheritance of the saints as a 'poor' person. It's a moment of victory---triumph!

John, what do you think Heaven is like?

And John says, "I'll tell you what Heaven is like. It's peopled by those who have been made victorious by Jesus Christ."

(I've told some of you this before---I do not hesitate to tell it to you again. My predecessor in my former parish was a veritable man of God. He was the personification of all that is true in God's shepherding love. One day I was walking down the street with him, and a simple-minded woman crossed the street in order to come over and stand in front of Dr. Bannen. And then she told him this---I'm admitting it, as simple-minded as it comes.....she said, "Dr. Bannen, when I die and go

to Heaven, you're going to ~~be~~ be the first one that I look for, and when I find you, I'm going to take you by the hand and introduce you to all of my friends, and I'm going to tell them that you're the one who showed me how to live triumphantly and how to get to Heaven." ) Spiritually naive, perhaps, but I know some people who of great intellect who would give almost their right hand if they could think and talk like that.

I submit to you, in the presence of this altar and in this holy place, I will count my life well-lived if in the last day I shall be able to find one person who would be able to say to me, "I enjoy the triumph of Heaven because you taught me how to live victoriously on earth, in the name of Jesus Christ."

Beloved, you want to know if you are Heaven bound? Here's a good test:

....How much of a warrior are you for Jesus Christ?

....How much of a battle are you engaged in, day after day,  
against the force of evil?

For Heaven is made up of those who have finished the course, who have fought a good fight, who have kept the faith! It is not just the choice of a pretty way of putting it when we say, from this lectern..."Members of the Family of God, we announce the passing from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant.....the entrance of one who has finished his course in the faith.

How much thought have you given to Heaven, my friend? When our Lord was here on earth, He kept talking about Heaven and it made all the difference in the world ....right then, here on earth. Set your affection on Heaven, my friend!.....

.....see how much of it will be mirrored and reflected.....now!

\* \* \* \*



August 27, 1961

"THE EXTRAVAGANCE OF LOVE"

The sermon, based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, bears the title, "The Extravagance of Love"; and the text, these words from the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And he said unto him, Take care of him,  
and whatever more you need, when I return  
I will repay."

(The parable of the Good Samaritan happened to have been told by our Lord Jesus Christ when a man stood up, trying to engage Jesus in conversation. He asked Him one question and then, not being satisfied, he put another question to Jesus. And as an answer to that question, Jesus told the unforgettable parable of the Good Samaritan.

To be quite honest with you, I am not so certain that Jesus actually answered his question. For the parable of the Good Samaritan is not the answer of a question such as was raised by the lawyer. The lawyer raised the question, "Who is my neighbor?", and the parable of the Good Samaritan is the answer to an entirely different question, closely related, but entirely different.....not, "Who is my neighbor?", but rather, "To whom can I be a neighbor?".....and there is all the difference in the world. The man who lives next door to me may be my neighbor, but it does not follow that I will treat him neighborly.)

(It's because we're prone to miss the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan that each of us is inclined to react like the little Sunday School boy who, when his teacher was telling the story of the parable of the Good Samaritan, outlining very, very carefully how it happened that there was a man in dire need, who was befriended by a man who came along that road....having been asked by his Sunday School teacher, "What is the lesson of the parable of the Good Samaritan?".....the little boy replied, "Why, it simply means that when we're in trouble, people ought to help

"The Extravagance of Love" (2)

us." This is not the lesson of the Good Samaritan. We should never focus our own eyes upon ourselves in need, waiting expectantly for somebody to come along and help us, as though they, because of us, are obligated to do something. )

I'll grant you that life has been made worth living for some of us because we do believe that when we are in need, eventually there may be someone who will not pass by. This is always the happy prospect about life for some of us; and even though the night may be long and the road may be difficult, at least somewhere, somehow, someone will come along who won't ignore us, who won't treat us with indifference, but in our time of need will do something. This is why some of us go on living--because we know that this, in the plan of God, would happen.....only one out of every three, per chance, and it may not occur until we're half dead, but eventually there might be someone who won't ignore us, who won't treat us with indifference, but who will prove himself friendly.

But this, I say to you again, is not the basic principle of the parable of the Good Samaritan.....not that you and I should go through life encouraged with the prospect that somebody in our time of need will help us, but rather the obligation that rests upon me as a person who seeing somebody else in need, will prove myself neighborly to him. Jesus did not answer the question directly, because honestly now, the question that the lawyer put to Him was not the important question....for the question is never "Who is my neighbor?" - but, "To whom can I be a neighbor?" In answering the questioner, perhaps not so much the question, Jesus laid down the groundwork for true Christian compassion, for true Christian sympathy...if you please, for true Christian neighborliness.

Now let us see the various stages through which true Christian neighborliness passes. You remember the story for yourself....Traveler #3: the Good Samaritan..... compassion begins to take place when he takes note of the fact that there is a man lying in the gutter---when he makes note of the fact that there is someone in dire

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need. This is the first stage of true Christian neighborliness--the expression of true Christian love.....to become aware of the fact that there is someone in need.

You know what we do---of course you do...each of us has practiced it.....

.....we try not to pay attention

....we try not to notice...lest in seeing someone in need,

we're disturbed---we think we ought to do something,

but we don't want to be troubled

...we don't want to be plagued by what we've seen...haunted

because we did observe something.

(A distinguished Christian preacher in Germany has said, one of the first things that a Christian has to learn is eye control.....and then he reminds us of that parable of Judgment, spoken by our Blessed Lord, when they said.....

"When didn't we see you?

..."When didn't we see our neighbor in need?

..."When was there someone in prison and we did not see him then?

...."When was there someone needing garments and we did not see him in his impoverished condition?"

The first stage for the development of true Christian compassion begins with the fact that we take time to see---to be made aware of the fact that a problem exists---that there is someone in dire need.)

The second stage through which true Christian neighborliness and true Christian compassion go is, having been made aware of the fact that a problem exists, then I identify myself with that problem---I myself come into some kind of relationship with it. Significantly enough, the Good Book says:

"And the good Samaritan, when he saw him, came alongside of him....."

This is the second very important stage in the development of true Christian compassion.....to put yourself precisely alongside of the problem or the person in need.....

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or better still, to identify yourself with that man--to talk a language like this....

....."there but for the grace of God would be I!

...this man could be my brother--my father--my uncle

....this man could be my very dear friend.....and if this should

happen to him---if this should happen to me.....!"

.....then the springs of compassion begin to swell. This is always a very necessary stage in the development of true Christian compassion---to put yourself in the other man's position.....

...."If it were my child who was going to bed hungry tonight...

....if it were my child who had no clothing....

....if it were my father who was lonely, discouraged, disillusioned....."

.....I identify myself with it. This is always the second stage.

And the third stage is this: To say to myself, "I will do something now."

(I haven't read my church history well enough recently to remember all the facts. I simply remember that once upon a time, before we ever sent a single missionary from the United States, there was a man whose soul was on fire with God...who attended a meeting where for hour after hour they talked about the heathen in their ignorance...

....they talked about the pagan to whom no one had gone to tell the wonderful story of Jesus Christ.....

.....and they painted the terrible black picture of men and women dying because they do not know the Saviour Jesus Christ....

I presume they passed a resolution, I presume they formed a committee, I presume they agreed to meet again, a month later, perhaps--six months later.....as they were about to adjourn, and perhaps after the formal adjournment, I do not remember clearly---a man stood up, and with emotion that he could hardly control, he said,

"Is this the end of it? Is this where we stop?"

.....an itinerant preacher that he was, grabbing his satchel contain-

"The Extravagance of Love" (5)

ing all of his earthly belongings, he said,

"I will leave at once."

He couldn't possibly sit in that meeting without being constrained to do something at once. This is the third stage through which Christian compassion passes.. "If something has to be done, then let the need be met now, and let it be met through me." )

The next-to-the-last stage through which Christian compassion and true Christian neighborliness passes is this:

.....I will meet the need with whatever I have. I shall not say,

I do not have enough. I shall put to use at once whatever

it is that I have.....

Has the truth been imprinted upon your mind, my friend, that whenever there is any degree of love in a man's heart he always has something by which to begin. Love always has something at reach....love always has something to give. This is why it grieves me a great deal as a Pastor when I sit with two people--and with whatever insight God has given me after years of pastoral counseling I must make note of the fact that love seems no longer to be present....and I have to say to myself, there isn't much hope. For when love is no longer there, there is nothing to give. When there isn't anything to give, the need remains unmet. The Samaritan who happened to come along had enough love in his heart by which to begin to do something at once.

Now let us pause here for a moment; let us remember the title of the sermon. The title of the sermon is "The Extravagance of Love," and the text is the next-to-the-last verse in this Gospel lesson:

"And he said to the innkeeper, Take care of him, and whatever else you may need, whatever more you may need, when I return I will repay it."

Now let us recapitulate just for a minute, and see how at any one of these steps the Samaritan could have stopped, and we would have sung his praise.

....We would have said it would have been a decent and an honorable

"The Extravagance of Love" (6)

thing for a man to take notice of another man's need. After all, this is something-- to know that there is someone less fortunate than I---that there is someone who needs to have some attention given. He could have stopped at that point, and we would have said, well this isn't too bad---as long as there is someone, somewhere, who can't pass by without being touched.....we would have sung his praise.

....He could have said to himself...."I'll tell somebody else to handle this situation---I don't know much about first-aid.....I'm busy, I have an appointment to keep; but I will do this: I'll put a telephone call in, and I hope that somebody else will be able to do something about it....." .....and you and I would have sung the man's praise on that score, too----yes, we would have! He hadn't ignored the thing completely, and he's hoping that perhaps someone else with more resources, better equipment, with more time, will be able to do something about it. This isn't half bad! While he might have stopped at this point, having seen the man, having decided to do something, he takes his own bottle of wine, takes his own cruse of oil, he takes his own precious hour or two....and he does something about it.....

....and he could have stopped, and he could have said...."I've got you along the road halfway now, my brother. You're not going to die. And while I've been able to do this much for you, but after all, there is a limit to what a man can do. There are other people who require my time and my energy....."

.....he could have stopped at that point! ...and who among us would not have sung his praise?

But Jesus Christ was talking about true Christian compassion---Jesus Christ was talking about true Christian neighborliness. And love, in the sight of God, never leaves a job half-done. The Good Samaritan is the man who, having brought the man as far as he did, does not separate himself from the man's need---he does not concern himself simply with what he has done in the present moment.....but he also obligates his future! This is the extravagant gesture of love---to write off your future in be-

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half of a man's present obligation.

In this precious moment of their lives---I stood with them yesterday at 11:00 o'clock in the morning and again at 2:00 o'clock, when another couple came.....and I stood in the shadow of this altar; I was charged by the Christian church itself to hear the promises that they made to each other....."to have and to hold, from this day forth, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health--to love and to cherish.....until death separates us."

.....not for this moment alone.....not for the time when I told you for the first time that I loved you.....but true love obligates the future. This is Jesus Christ who gives us this lesson. The Good Samaritan could have said..."I've done my part--what more do they expect from a man? Isn't it enough that I have done what I've done?"

(Quite frankly, this is the part of the parable of the Good Samaritan that troubles me most. If only it didn't appear! To have Jesus Christ talk about a kind of neighborliness that obligates itself to the future, that says a job in the name of love can never be half-done.....a kind of love that's always talking about--if there is anything more. If only that weren't there, but it is. Frankly, beloved, you won't hear this kind of talk anywhere else. This is the specialty of the Christian church--to talk about a kind of love that is always dealing with "whatever more?"....that never leaves a job half-done. That's why, when you come to worship, there is always this cross upon the altar---the ever-present reminder of Jesus Christ, who having loved the way He loved! was given to understand, there is always something more to be done.... complete sacrificial outpouring!....that could never stop this side of Golgotha.)

Honestly, I am not so sure that you and I can ever be equal to this kind of preaching.....

.....we may form our committees

....we may pass our resolutions.....

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.....we may send our \$5.00 for China.....

.....but to say to the man who happened to have come in front  
of us---someone in your own family circle...whose need is very great....

...."I shall not ignore it....as long as the problem  
exists, you can count on me to be a part of the  
answer....."

.....it demands a great deal of any man. This is the glory of the Christian religion  
----to deal with the kind of love that considers the extravagant gesture a necessary  
feature.

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September 3, 1961

"SERMON FOR LABOR DAY"

The sermon could carry the sub-title "On-The-Job Christian"; the text, the 23rd verse of the 3rd chapter of Paul's Letter to the Colossians:

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord - - "

Quite frankly, there are some things that we just don't say to anyone, for anyone. There are some things that we have to say only to those whom we can trust—only to those whom we know fairly well.

This text is a perfectly good example. It is a text that is meant, if you please, for Christians and Christians only. When the Apostle Paul wrote this word of admonition he wasn't standing in a public square and saying it just to anyone who might pass by. He knew very well the type of person to whom he was giving this bit of advice.

There are some things that Christians say only to other Christians, and this text could fall in that category; not that Christians want to think of themselves as people who are quite exclusive, but simply because they don't want to run the risk of being misunderstood or being exploited because of what they've said.

Let me refer again to the text: ..... "whatever you do" —now, that's the point. You wouldn't say this to anyone that you meet.....

..... "Whatever you do, it's quite all right—go on doing it and do it with enthusiasm, and permit yourself to believe that what you're doing, you're doing as an offering to the Lord".....

..... it's this introductory part of

the text that raises the warning signal. You just wouldn't say to anyone you might meet, "Whatever you do, go on do it, with enthusiasm."

I don't know about you, but I know for myself....

...I couldn't possibly give this word of advice and counsel to a man who is an industrialist--who knowingly permits a product to be manufactured in his plant which is far inferior to the label that it carries....."Go on--turn out an inferior product--  
---go on doing it with enthusiasm".....you just wouldn't talk like that to him....

...<sup>or</sup> what would you say to the union official who is defrauding his dues-paying members...."Go on--keep it up....and do it with enthusiasm.....and permit yourself to believe that this type of thing that you're doing is pleasing to God."....  
...the call girl---who ekes out a living that way...<sup>would</sup> and you say(?)  
...."Go on---get your clothes---pay your rent---make a living".....

There are some things that you just wouldn't say to everyone, especially when the type of thing that claims their energies is downright dishonorable, immoral, unworthy.

The Apostle Paul knew the people to whom he was writing, so he said to them....."As people who have committed themselves to Jesus Christ"....

.....as people who allowed themselves to believe that all that they were and all that they did was <sup>accountable</sup> acceptable to Jesus Christ. To those people he says, "Now you go on wherever you may go--I can trust you, because I can't possibly think of a Christian dissipating his energy and his talent....I can't think of a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, giving himself to anything that's immoral,

dishonorable, indecent. Whatever you do," says the Apostle Paul, "do it heartily and as unto the Lord."

(This was the <sup>^</sup>great contribution that Martin Luther made. During the Reformation period he kept preaching that anyone engaged in honest work was doing something as sacred as the work of the priest, the monk, the sister. How did he put it?...."The shoe repairman who repairs his shoes and makes them tight and secure against all kinds of weather for the boy who wears the shoes...the cobbler, then, who does this sort of thing is doing the work as pleasing in the sight of God as the priest who stands with folded hands before the altar." )

Now, come now, you say to yourself....I'm a Christian. Dare I believe that whatever I do on a Monday morning is God's work? It's easy for me to believe it, Preacher, when I see you standing in the pulpit--when I look upon you and your kind, <sup>as people</sup> who have given their lives and their talents to doing the Lord's work completely.....

.....visiting the sick....counseling the young and the old...

...declaring God's truth....being a shepherd to a congregation..

...spending all of your time and your energy in doing anything and everything that bears the label of God....

.....this I can understand! But I'm not a preacher.

Dare I believe that I'm doing work as sacred as yours?

.....I can understand the school-teacher...investing his or her life in humanity.....molding in the influential years of

the lives of those who are young--this I can understand!--molding a child's mind and spirit!

.....I can understand a doctor.....a nurse....giving themselves to the healing arts.....

I'm a Christian, Preacher. I love the Lord Jesus. I claim Him as my Redeemer.

Dare I believe that if I were a street-sweeper, that as I brushed my broom along Broadway, clearing the street of refuse, that what I'm doing is as much as a vocation as yours?.....

.....I work on the assembly line, Preacher.....if you only knew what I have to do---that most monotonous of all things. It isn't simply day after day, but it's hour after hour....doing the same monotonous thing--with dread repetition.....never getting the satisfaction of putting out the full and complete production myself. Dare I, a cog in a machine, believe that what I'm doing is sacred in God's sight?

....how about the scientist? the technician? the chap in the laboratory? ...who simply follows the day's assignment. What he does, he does almost completely ignorant of the end result. It's highly classified. He doesn't know the project on which he works. Dare I believe that what he's doing is something pleasing to God? Can he permit himself, if you please, the tonic of a wholesome pride when the day's work is done?....."Today, O God, I did something for you--for the betterment of all mankind!".....and perchance he doesn't even know what he's been doing! Can a Christian believe this sort of thing?

If you think these are uncomfortable thoughts, how about the people to whom the Apostle Paul had been writing? For the most part, they were slaves! To be in bondage to a master! To never permit myself to know the fruits of my efforts and my children! Can I, as a slave, believe that when I go and give myself to the menial chores of every day, that what I'm doing, I'm doing to the glory of God?

If the Christian Church cannot talk like this....if I, as a minister of the Gospel cannot confront you with this text on this Labor Day Sunday....then the Christian religion is, of all religions, unreal and completely irrelevant to the work-a-day world. A Christian is not just a person who happens to come to church on a Sunday morning. Let me put it for you this way: This is not Saint Luke Church alone. We'll be spending perhaps 45-50 minutes together right now. This is not the sum total of your relationship to Jesus Christ. And if I had in my office, or on the wall of the office of Saint Luke Church, a map--pin-pointing where you live.....if I had another map, pin-pointing where the member of Saint Luke Church works.....in a certain sense, this would be more a picture of Saint Luke Church than one hour on a Sunday morning--hot as it may be, the first week of September.

Perchance I'll stand at the door greeting you as you leave. Did you ever ask yourself.....I wonder what he thinks. What's going through the mind of my Pastor as he bids me farewell for another week?

I'll tell you what I sometimes think. I shake your hand as you turn your back upon this altar; I say to myself.....this, now, is Saint Luke Church--scattered one hundred and one different ways. This, now, is Saint Luke Church, going out into the world.....this, now, is Saint Luke Church, getting ready for a Monday morning and for a conference on a Thursday afternoon....

....this is the Christian....where if a man lives to be 60 or 65, someone has said that the sum total of the accumulation of all of his working time would amount to fifteen years. This is mighty important! ...and hour-wise, put over against that the time that you spend in church, when you say your prayers, when you read your Bible.....and it would almost be insignificant--hour-wise.

So the Christian Church does say to you, "Wherever you go, now, whatever you're about to do, remember Jesus Christ goes with you....He is looking over

your shoulder....He is standing by your side when you make that entry into the ledger.....you cannot escape Him.....you cannot evade Him.

Now the Apostle Paul says...."Since you've become a Christian, you just ~~couldn't~~ <sup>didn't</sup> say, "Lord Jesus, I give you one hour on a Sunday morning....two minutes when I read my Bible in the morning....two minutes when I say my prayers at night' .....when you became a Christian you offered Him your life...and because this is true, the Apostle Paul says...."Now I can trust you. As a Christian, whatever you do, ~~fixit~~ allow yourself to believe that you're doing it to the Lord's name."

Now you ought to ask yourself the question.....how can I tell? how can I know that what I'm doing is to the glory of God?

One sure test is this:

--will the world be any better off because of the type of thing that you're doing?

--is this for the improvement, the betterment, of mankind?  
.....a good question.

A man came to me during the course of the week....."Pastor, I am about to change jobs. Have you any advice or counsel to give me?"

And the first question I had to ask was this: "Can you allow yourself to think that what you are about to do will be for people's good?"

The second thing you ought to ask yourself:

--can I become enthusiastic about the thing that I'm about to do?

I would think, outside of a man who has yet to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, that one of the most miserable of all people would certainly be the man who drags his feet to his work---who has no spring in his step---who has no joy in his labor. And one sure way to make your labor light is to be able to believe that what you're doing is for the good of men and the glory of God.

( There was a time in my life when I believed that when we die and go to Heaven, the only thing that my Lord would look at would be my heart---to search if for its motives. I have a different figure of speech now. Since Jesus Christ calls for total commitment, I believe He'll look at my mind--the thoughts I've had---the programs I've planned---the things I've purposed to do....

.....I also believe, (and this is a figure of speech)...He'll look at my hands.....and next to this question, the question--"Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?".....He might ask....

....."While you were on earth, what, in Heaven's name, were you doing?" )

It's a paraphrase: "Whatever you do, do it as unto the Lord."

\* \* \*

September 10, 1961

"THE RECOVERY OF A QUESTION MARK"

The general idea, the text and the title for the sermons to be preached in Saint Luke Church are usually planned, projected, a year in advance. The sermons from now until next June, for the most part, will deal with some passage of Scripture from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Today's sermon bears the title, "The Recovery of a Question Mark" and the text is the 7th verse of the 4th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And when they had set them in the midst,  
they asked, By what power, or by what  
name, have ye done this?"

( In writing the life story of an individual Christian, there is much to be said for the use of a question mark. In fact, ever so frequently, as you deal with an individual Christian, you ought to find yourself constrained to ask questions. Quite frankly, there ought to be something about any Christian that would make a <sup>person</sup> ask a question <sup>or so.</sup> )

It was true in the life of our Lord, and you and I as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ ought to follow Him as closely as we can; and that should be most certainly true in the instance of raising questions. It's the Apostle Paul that said every Christian should be as a kind of Christ, and if you and I are to follow Him closely enough, it's to be expected, then, that people should ask questions about us.

Take the life of our Lord as an example. Why, when He was a very small baby, while yet an infant, some of the wisest men of the world, who, when they thought about Him, came from the East.....used a couple of words and a question mark-----"Where is He?"

.....That kind of thing followed Him all the days of His life. When He came to the last week of His earthly existence and He entered Jerusalem triumph-



antly, one man said to another, feverishly, anxiously...."Who is this man?"

.....Pontius Pilate was the governor before whom He appeared. People usually remember Pontius Pilate for two things---a man who washed his hands in public, to indicate that he had nothing to do with Jesus Christ; and he is also the man who is remembered because of the questions that he asked about Jesus. It was Pontius Pilate who raised the question...."Are you a king?".....

....it was Pontius Pilate who raised the question..."What shall I do with Jesus?"

Wherever He went, Jesus had the faculty of calling attention to Himself and forcing people to ask questions about Him.

There was something about Jesus Christ that couldn't possibly be ignored. I also tell you---there should be something about the individual follower of Jesus Christ that cannot be ignored. So true is this in the life of Jesus--so important was it---that if people were not asking questions about Him, He made it His business to see that they asked questions. He is not to be ignored. Attention should be paid to Him; and we have the Biblical record of the account when once He Himself said to the disciples, when they seemed so indifferent, as Christians can be....."Who do you think Jesus Christ is?"

To the everlasting credit of the early church, there were those in that company who so followed Jesus Christ that wherever they went, attention was paid to them, and people asked questions. The text indicates the fact that Peter, in a certain city, had so attracted the authorities that when they called him, all they could do when they looked at him was to interrogate him. He had done something.....by what power? ....in whose name? had he done this. This is one of the glories of the early Christian church.....there were people in the early church who so lived that when people saw them, they had to ask them the question: ...."How is this possible?.....Explain this thing that you're able to do!"

Now I say rather quickly, it's one thing to have attention called to yourself, it's one thing to have people ask questions about you, but for heaven's sake, make sure that they ask the right questions, the proper questions. There are people today who are asking questions about Christians. They're not the kindest questions, they're not the most complimentary questions. From the outside, we Christians get this kind of a question hurled at us, and sometimes with scorn and ridicule....."Why don't you practice what you preach?"....

....it's echoed sometimes in the home. A parent may say to the boy or to the girl having been confirmed in the Christian faith....."You knelt before the altar---you promised to love and serve Jesus Christ....why, then, do you do what you do?.....why don't you behave differently?.....is this the way for a Christian to act?"

....It's not a pleasant thing to realize that in some quarters of the world there are those who say....."Why was it that in the United States of America the Supreme Court, which never pretends to be a religious body, nor should, should out-run many Christian churches in the decree that they've handed down that has troubled the South and troubled the North....and yet when it comes to an ideal and to a plan, they've out-run many Christians?"

....This is the kind of question that some people raise when they think of Christians. Attention should be drawn to us, but be careful, my friend, of the kind of question that you raise in people's minds.

I used to think, as a youngster, that I would be happy if I could have lived when the church was young....if I could have walked in the company of Peter and Paul and Mark. Now that I've become older, I say to myself.....what did they have that we can't have now? And I used to say.....well, they could perform miracles---they could cause blind men to see---lame men to walk---and, on occasion, a man, dead, to come back to life. To have so great gift! I envied them...and

I thought this was their crowning glory.

....And then, as I would read my New Testament, I would discover that every now and then they had the gift of tongues--they could speak a strange language, one to another, and yet always understand!....and I would say to myself.....wouldn't that be wonderful!

.....every time I would meet a true follower of Jesus Christ, granted I myself could qualify, we'd always be able to understand each other!.....

....this is a priceless gift that's expressed every now and then in Saint Luke Church.....when committee meetings are being held....~~in~~ a Church Council meeting is being conducted.....an Annual Meeting taking place down in Bieber Hall .....when everyone present seems to speak the same language, think the same thought, be of one mind and one spirit where the basic work of the Christian church is involved. This is a priceless thing!

But, in the preparation of this sermon I've satisfied my mind that the thing that I wish the church today had most, that the early church had, is the faculty by which they made people ask questions----not particularly about themselves alone, but because of the wonderful power at work in their lives by which they were able to do extraordinary things----exceptionally wonderful things!

(Halford Luccock, a distinguished theologian of another day, is perfectly right when he says--I've forgotten the exact words.....that the church today stands in need of the recovery of a question mark; there aren't enough people who, when they see us, ask questions about the power----the thing, if you please, in the jargon of the hour, that 'makes us tick.' )

It's only rarely, you see, that we meet a person who, when confronted in a crisis, stands up nobly, with the blessed assurance, possessed by a quiet calm and an inner faith, that come wind or weather, God will take care of everything.

In moments of crisis most of us seem to disintegrate--deteriorate, if you please --we go to pieces.....we say things that Christians ought never to say....we think things that Christians ought never to think.....and our witness is weak. Only rarely do you find someone who is a tower of strength, stands up and faces the issue at hand.....and then you and I walk away and we say..."How is this possible? ....whence this power? ...whence this strength?"

To the credit of the Sanhedrin--that's the group of authorities who tried to put Peter on the spot.....when they asked the question about Peter, they asked the right question....."By what power? ...in whose name--have you done what you've done?" For Christians should so live that when people see them and come in contact with them they would know that you're possessed by something that's absolutely out of this world---that there's something about their lives that you just can't explain in the here and now.

(Years ago I heard Dr. Reinartz, at that time the Secretary of our Church, now the President of our Theological Seminary in the South, share with a group of us a very precious thing about a set of parishioners in his congregation that he had once served. I can't name for you now the particular crisis in their lives, but they were made adequate to the situation at hand; and he said, "I'm new here as your pastor. Would you mind telling me how you've been able to stand up as well as you have? How could you have faced what you did?"

And the reply--a majestic one....."Pastor, you are new here and you don't know us very well; but we're happy to tell you that we have resources--we have spiritual resources in our faith through Jesus Christ!" )

Now, that's what you had to say about Peter. What made him the kind of person that made somebody else ask the question that was raised--"By what power--in whose name--can you do this?".....what had he done? He had performed the great miracle; and then when he came and stood in front of the authorities, they

were impressed by his magnificent stubbornness. He refused to deny what he had done. He stood his ground—he was unafraid of them. He was also a man who was possessed by one great purpose in life—to do anywhere, at any time, what he felt God wanted him to do. And he was the type of person who fervently believed that if there was something that had to be done in God's name, and he happened to be there, then God would make him adequate. Now, that's the kind of man Peter was. And when a man believes and acts that way, people just naturally ask questions.

( My friend, as your spiritual advisor, I am constrained to put this question to you.....

.....is there anything at all about your life that would make someone else ask the question as to how you're able to be as strong as you are in Jesus....?

.....or could it be that, as a Christian, you just go your way and no one ever pays any attention to you at all—? nor should they in this way...there isn't anything distinctive about you, by way of strength and power and character in Christ.

The glory of your life could be when someone says....

..."How can you be so Christian?"

The shame of your life could be if, having taken the name of Christ, no one ever asks the question about your strength. )

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September 17, 1961

"AT A YOUNG MAN'S FEET"

(The sermon today bears the title, "At A Young Man's Feet," and the text is the 58th verse of the 7th chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."

You are aware of the fact, aren't you, that this is the first appearance that Saul makes in the New Testament. This is the man who later on was to become the most influential person in the name of Jesus Christ, perchance, that has ever lived. When you think of him, you think of his great conversion experience...you think of the churches that he organized...of the converts that he claimed for Jesus Christ...the basic theology that he laid down in letter after letter that he wrote to groups of Christians so dear to his heart.

But I would remind you that it wasn't always that way, and while we may, for the moment, prefer to remember all that is glamorous in his life and all that is exceedingly wonderful, there is that other chapter that you dare not forget.) There was a time in the life of Saul when he was the man that Christians feared most. He was the man who received official orders that he might persecute Christians. With great zeal, he wanted to stamp them out. This is the first time, as you read this text, that Saul appears in the pages of the New Testament...and I ask you now, in this moment, how does he appear? Your first introduction to him is to Saul the spectator...the person standing on the side of the road...the person who is observing.

In the development of any single life there are always, it seems to me, three stages in maturation. The first one is the role of the spectator--the person who observes. This is so particularly true of those who are young. A young person is one who is exposed to many, many things. A young person is one of whom

we sometimes say 'they don't miss a trick'...they see everything. For this is their rightful role. They are not yet mature enough to identify themselves wholly and completely as participants....

..."and the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of  
a young man whose name was Saul...." .....a man standing  
by the side of the road....a young man, not fully mature--in the first stage of  
maturation....a spectator who observed.

And what did he see? Read for yourselves the entire 7th chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles....and be rightfully alarmed! Saul observed a group of human beings as an infuriated mob---behaving like a pack of wolves--incensed, irritated, annoyed.....they took a Christian and they lifted him bodily, threw him from a precipice.....and then, in order that they might not be deterred, they removed their garments so that with greater freedom they could pick up huge stones to hurl upon him, so that this man would meet certain death....

.....and all the time they were doing it, they were behaving with nothing  
except animal-like passion....even as the writer of the record says,  
..."they gnashed their teeth"...they ranted and they raved...  
they rushed upon him.....this is what Saul beheld.

The second stage in the development of the mature person is when he passes from the role of the observer to one who begins to take sides. And after you've read this chapter, we come upon these words that seem to follow quite naturally...

"...and Saul consented to the death of Stephen."

....why not? The majority of the people  
were behaving this way. Might seems to be making for right. You have little to choose from. Everyone there acting like a mad-man...wanting to kill this person...  
...completely. The second stage in the development of the person who is mature  
is when he begins to take sides.

And then the third and final stage in maturation is when he says, "I'll get into this thing myself...I'll become a participant...I will assume my rightful role." That's exactly, then, what this man Saul decided to do. You read on for a chapter or so, and you discover that he gets official orders--he's armed now--legally, officially, so it would appear--to bring Christians persecution. From the spectator to the participant.....and all because he happened to observe.

Fortunately, the story doesn't end there. He saw not only everyone, so it would appear, acting like wolves...but there was one man, the object of their fury, who refused to behave like an animal---no ape-ish quality, but rather angelic. He turned his eyes heavenward and he said...."I see Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God the Father."....

.....and when they were killing this man, he made a prayer, asking God to lay not this thing against their charge....and then, with the terrible impact of the stones, with their brutal blow upon his body, he fell asleep, resigning himself completely into the hands of God.

...Saul also observed this. It took quite a while till he remembered it, but he couldn't quite ignore it.....and Augustine is perfectly right when he says that the Christian church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen.....

.....but suppose Saul had never seen Stephen die?

.....suppose Saul had only seen men acting like animals? ...suppose this was the only thing that he'd ever observed....

.....what might he have become?

I stand here at the sacred desk on this Sunday dedicated to the young people of this parish, asking those of us who are older to recognize the responsibility which is ours in taking careful heed as to what it is we put in front of them. Young people are the last to admit that they are the great imitators. Young people would be the last to recognize that they have a way of responding to anything and



everything to which they have been exposed. You and I may not know it, but whatever it is that happens in life of which we have been any part at all, it has some kind of effect upon us.

(When I was a camper at Nawakwa, we always looked forward to the first night when we had the campfire. And if I remember correctly, the Director of the camp, Dr. Fischer, would always tell us in solemn tones....."Young men, look carefully into the fire. Watch for the different hues, shades, tints, colors....for someone has said that when a log is burning it reflects every color to which the tree had been exposed in its lifetime. In these embers tonight you will see the terrible black of the thunderstorm---you will see the pinks and the violets of dawn--you may see something of the green in a leaf of spring--you may see something of the scarlet or the gold of an autumn leaf."

I would say to you this morning--that in the life that you and I live, eventually you and I reflect all the things of which we've been part---for good, or for ill. In the impressionable days of their youth, we who are adults must walk very carefully---very circumspect.....we are being observed.)

Nevin Harner, in a book that he has written bearing the title, "Youth Work in the Church," says that there are five or six basic needs in the life of all young people.....

.....they need to find God

.....they need to find themselves

.....they need to find their life work

.....they need to find their life mate

.....they need to find their place in society and their relationship to it

.....they need to find their place in the Christian Church and how to behave as citizens of the Kingdom

.....and how, I ask you, will they find these things, except as they discover the ways by which you and I have found them?

( I don't want to stretch this too far, and I realize full well that there are limitations to what I am saying.....but tell me the kind of a father that a daughter has, and I'll tell you the kind of a man she'll choose for a husband....  
...tell me the way a husband treats his wife, and I'll have some indication of the way the young man will treat his mate---and the kind of woman for whom he will look! There's more truth to it than you're willing to admit..."I want a girl just like the girl that married dear old dad." How will they find their needs met, except as they look around and discover how you and I have found our needs met? I have little patience with those who say that young people are to blame. This isn't a young person's world! It's a world that belongs to those who have reached 40 and beyond. We are the pace-setters--we are the standard-bearers.)

It was a foolhardy thing that a young Britisher did when he went to his first parish. Quite concerned for the future, he said, "I'm going to concentrate on young people. I'll give them my undivided attention....and then when they become adults, I will have created for them a mold...I will do this for the church." A happy thought, and I think I can understand it...but he forgot to reckon with the fact that young people have parents; he forgot to reckon with the fact that parents are associated with their children in a far more intimate way than the Christian church....and while they saw the Dominie only one or two hours a week, there was the constant influence of the home, consciously or unconsciously being exerted upon them.

( I want to read something for you that is not at all pleasing, but it ought to be read, for it ought to be heard. It's a letter that was written by a young person to the editor of the New York Times. I can't tell you exactly what brought this correspondence on. It will be enough if you read between the lines to your-

self....."I think I speak for youth when I say we are sick to death of platitudes and cliches--a flag-waving and heroic attitude, of talk and little action, of political parties and political corruption and all of the other paraphernalia which are our unsavory heritage. No, Mr. Editor, it is not ours that is the lost generation--it is yours. We only ask that you don't take us down with it." ...a terrible indictment, my friends.)

The longer I am in the ministry, the more I am convinced that young people are simply adults in miniature....and they are the miniature edition of the adults with whom they associate. Of course this is a generalization, of course it is, but there is enough truth in the generalization that none of us can ignore it. Some of us who work with your young people find them, in later adolescence, even talking, let alone thinking, the way you do. And sometimes it's exceedingly wonderful that they should.....and sometimes we almost cry our hearts out because they do. And so much of it develops only through little things--a thing as little as this: an invitation to attend the Fellowship Suppers.....an adult should ignore the invitation--should think it not at all important to learn about the Kingdom, especially as part of that program affects their young people, and the young people of this parish.....and the young person who observes..."If it's not important to them, why should it be important to me?"

(....."and the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul." .....small wonder that he became the person that he did--the force of evil was so pronounced that it made that terrible dent upon his soul, and he followed the way most of those adults were behaving. But praise be to God! there was one man who stood up in a salutary fashion, who behaved more like an angel than an ape....and this made its impression, too.

In whatever time some of us have left, God grant that we may be more on the side of the angels. }

September 24, 1961

"ON BEING AFRAID OF AN IDEA"

The sermon today bears the title, "On Being Afraid of an Idea," and the text is from the 4th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the 1st and 2nd verses:

"And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead."

As we read these early chapters in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, we come very quickly upon the fact that while the church was very, very young, she had a direct clash with the authorities of the church and with the authorities of the state. Today's passage of Scripture is the initial evidence of the initial clash, and it all happened, I presume, because Peter and John talked too much.

They had performed a miracle. Peter and John, as was their custom, had gone up to the temple area to pray. And as they got very near to the temple gate, ~~in~~ fact at the Gate which is called Beautiful, there was a man, lame, who begged for their attention. He must have believed that there was something about them, that if only they would pay attention to him, he would be the better for it. So he began by asking them for money. Peter stopped and looked the man who was lame straight in the eye and he said, "I don't have any silver, and I don't have any gold, but I'll tell you, what I do have, you can have...in the name of Jesus, get up and walk!" ...and presto!--a miracle was performed... ..a man got up and walked around---Exhibit A. And all the people quickly gathered. They weren't accustomed to seeing miracles like this.

(Now it wasn't enough for Peter and John that the miracle should be performed. Peter, bless his soul, might have known a measure of delight in being a miracle-worker, but he was incurably a preacher. And when he saw a throng of people come, he mounted his pulpit, he began to preach and to talk. He just couldn't keep quiet. And in order that they might know the full significance of what they were seeing, he began to tell them about Jesus Christ...."It was Jesus Christ that entered into this man...it was Jesus Christ that gave this man newness of strength in body and in soul!" )

As the crowd grew and grew, the people on the inside of the church took notice of the people on the outside of the church; and so the church officials came very quickly. They brought with them the superintendent of the temple police....."Enough of this!" ....they brought charges....Peter and John were thrown into jail. And all, I say, because they were talking too much. Ah, I have to correct myself--not just because they were talking too much, but because they were pin-pointing the thing they were talking about with the man whose life had been changed. You've heard it said many times--"Talk is cheap. Don't worry as long as they talk. Let them get it out of their system." It's as harmless as all that!

(Why, then, did the authorities of the church become tremendously interested in the man who was talking too much? They became interested in Peter and John because they were talking about new ideas.....and the world has its own way of always being afraid of a new idea. Someone has said that while it may be a hard thing to get a new idea into a man's head, it's harder still to get an old one out! ...and for this reason alone, people always seem to be afraid of something that's new. Now they wouldn't have worried too much, I think, if they would have kept this in the talking stage, but Peter and John were able to bring out, constantly, Exhibit A----"This is what happens when this new idea takes hold in a person's life....here is a man who was lame--now he's healthy and strong!"

.....You see, people become afraid of ideas when they come home to roost in

people's lives....

....people become afraid of ideas when they take legs and start to walk around....

....people become afraid of ideas for the simple reason that ideas can change a man....

.....and a man who has been changed, joining heart and soul with other people who have been changed, can change a whole order...can change a whole world! And that's exactly why the officials were afraid of these people. They were people of a New Idea, ....and they had come to recognize Exhibit A---when this Idea lays hold on people. )

(What was this Idea that these Christians had? What were Peter and John talking about that caused so much attention to be brought to the officials? I'll tell you what they were talking about. They were saying that God at one time in history had come into the world in the Person of Jesus Christ....they were saying that once upon a time God had a New Departure---God was unwilling to confine Himself in old ways....and God broke forth into the world in a brand new way!

This troubled the Jewish officials. They were perfectly content to get along with the old ideas---to keep God in the Old Testament, as He behaved and as He acted then....but to have to accept this brand new notion, that a God who invades history and comes to life in the present moment.....this was a new idea and they were not quick to accept it.....

....then, to believe that God could come to life in a person like Jesus Christ! ....and when Peter and John said, "You thought you killed Him, but I tell you the idea for which He stood has been personified by His Spirit and it's abroad throughout all the world---it's alive in us!---We are witness to the fact that Jesus Christ is alive! .....this was a brand new idea.

To be perfectly certain, those who were responsible for the crucifixion of

Jesus Christ thought that this was the end when they nailed Him to the cross. But you can't crucify ideas. You can't kill them. They have a way of coming back to life, and always to find lodgement in someone's soul...

...they tell me it's only legend, but let's accept the lesson of the legend: ...John Huss of Bohemia was an ardent follower of Jesus Christ, long before the days of Martin Luther. He called to the attention of his people certain errors in the church of his day. He tried to bring the Christians of that generation back to the Bible. He couldn't be quiet---he preached every time he had a chance to preach, and he wrote one book after another. They tell me that there were people in his day who were afraid of his new ideas.

...and do you know what the legend says? They had him dressed in his ecclesiastical vestments....they paraded him down to the old village square in Prague ....then they tied him to a stake, and at his feet they heaped the books which he had written. Then they set fire to these books, which in turn caused him to be burned at the stake.....

....the legend has it that as the flames licked round about his body, he laughed!---laughed at the folly of men, who thought they could burn an idea.

Christians have always been people who have had great ideas....

.....great ideas about God and great ideas about Jesus Christ

.....great ideas about the salvation of their own souls

.....great ideas about the resurrection from the dead

---once these ideas have laid hold upon them, they have been able to change the very situation in which they find themselves.

( I used to say to myself, --how odd that the Communists would waste time on Christians in certain parts of Europe...for I have fresh remembrance of having worshiped in certain Christian congregations in Europe---and only fragmentary evidence of the congregational life--less than 10%, less than 5%, of Christians wor-

shipping on a Sunday. And I used to say to myself, what a foolish thing that the Communists would post a man in the church yard and make note of the people who came to church. It's so insignificant!

....but the Communists and the Soviets know that Christians have been people with wonderful ideas--with tremendous concepts about God and life, and the value of a human soul. Christians might not flock to their churches in large numbers, but any Christian who is Idea-possessed--any Christian who has the lofty thought of God throbbing through his soul can be a dangerous person.) And how well they knew it!

(And I say to you, teachers and officers of the Sunday School in Saint Luke Church, today---understand how I say it as advisedly as I can....if the day would ever come, and none of us can think of such a day...but if the day should ever come that the Communists ever established any kind of a foothold in America, let me assume the role of a prophet, if only for a moment.....I am inclined to think that their first target, people-wise, could be the Sunday School teacher. For next to what happens in the pulpit, the Sunday School teacher is basically an idea-peddler who is sowing into the minds and souls of those who are young these grand and glorious ideas about God and the value of the human soul.

But I would warn you, they never paid much attention to Christians as long as they talked, but they did pay attention to Christians when the things they talked about changed their lives. And if the Communists wouldn't pay any attention to you, it might be because you did nothing but teach words, and you never succeeded in getting over to the minds of your boys and girls that this idea about God had changed your life.)

There are people in the world today who are afraid of new ideas---new ideas when they take hold of people. For century after century the Christian Church has taught the decendy of the human individual---the integrity which God Himself has



stamped upon any person. The Christian Church has always talked about this--that every man is a child of God and has a soul and should be recognized and treated as such. And the world hasn't worried too much about it.....except every now and then, somebody allows that Idea to have a heart and a mind and legs.....

...the Idea gets up and walks around

...the Idea rides a Freedom Bus

...the Idea parks in a restaurant, and wears a peculiar kind of designation

---the world pays little attention to those preachers from New England, and the world paid little attention to that preacher down here on 16th St.--until somehow, the Idea got hold of him and he did something with it. This, you see, is why people can be afraid of ideas---because they can become alive!

I say to you this morning from this sacred desk---has this Idea of God, this Idea of Jesus Christ, this Idea of the resurrection, this Idea of the eternal worth of the human soul, become alive in you? It's the most glorious thing that can happen. St. John, when he writes the fourth Gospel, says....

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
-- and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, and this Word came and dwelt among us."

The world is waiting for the Idea of God in Jesus Christ to come alive through you, where people are.

I have to say this in closing, and it's something that troubles me a great deal.....these Christians ran into trouble when the Church was young because they took Christianity out into the street---where people were...and allowed their ideas to become alive--out there. For God's sake, for the world's sake, don't you dare lock up your ideas about God inside a Sunday School class room--inside the walls of this church.....don't lock up your idea about God. Let it breathe fresh air!---out where the world is hungry. )

"CHRISTIANITY'S UNDENIABLE EVIDENCE"

The sermon bears the title, "Christianity's Undeniable Evidence" and the text is the 13th verse of the 4th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

(When the 101st Air-borne Division landed in Europe, it was a very clever thing that the commanding officer devised. Many of them would be landing within the line of the enemy. They were to descend under cover of darkness. How would it be possible, in the black of the night, for an American airman to know whether or not the man he heard crouching against the hedge was the enemy or a fellow soldier? Required equipment given to each of the men in the 101st Air-borne Division was a very simple thing--a same type of thing that lecturers use when, as they give an illustrated lecture, they signal to the man operating the projector---he depresses that little tin cricket. This was to be the signal of the American airman in the night...hearing another man, he would depress the cricket; the American airman would respond by depressing his cricket. So he would be able to recognize, at once, friend or foe.

Wouldn't it be a grand thing if, in this battle of life, you and I as we journey along, would be able to recognize by some outward sign whether the man we meet is a fellow-believer or not---a fellow-combatant in this struggle for good against evil. Unfortunately, I must say to you, there is no real outward sign by which you can tell whether a man is a Christian or not. I wish it were possible that as soon as you see someone you could say to yourself.....He's a Christian, I know!--by his outward appearance.)

I know full well that if I had a photograph of this congregation at worship

now, and we faded out the walls and all the ecclesiastical atmosphere of your setting, then I put this photograph against the faces of other people, assembled in other places for other purposes...and let us say, for the purpose of this sermon right now, a photograph--a blown-up photograph--of people gathered in anything but a Christian meeting.....if I did not know you, I'm not so sure that I could pick out the Christian group. It is extremely difficult to tell by the outward appearance whether a man is a Christian or not. Some of us have lived long enough to make the sad admission that not even all people who look like saints, really are.

How, then, can you tell a Christian? What is the undeniable evidence? What is the trade-mark?.....

....Immediately we say, it is not outward appearance. Jesus said to a group of disciples....."Ye are the salt of the earth." ....did it ever occur to you that a bowl of potatoes on the dinner table that is salted does not look one bit different than the bowl of potatoes that has not been salted. There is no outward sign.....

.....and it would be an easy thing, too, if you knew the depth of a man's thought. How does he use his intellect? Does he have unusual intellectual gifts? Wouldn't it be a grand thing if you could say to yourself---any true intellect---well, this is one way by which you can tell a Christian. This is not so! They looked at Peter and John....they said, "These men are unlearned...they are ignorant!" Mental ability is not a tell-tale trait.....

.....there are some people who believe that culture in itself becomes a characteristic of a Christian. Yet I submit to you this morning, some of the finest artists that the world may ever have known...some of the finest men of letters---with all their learning, with all their culture, are men and women who have never known what it was to bow their heads in the name of Jesus Christ..and to plead to Him for pardon and the entire forgiveness of their every sin....

.....you can't tell a Christian because you say, this is a man who dedicates himself to raising the standards of morality in society. It might help, and yet I shudder when I recognize the truth that today, in this age in which you and I live, there are men and women who are giving themselves to raising moral standards, who have never been inside a Christian church....and their passion for a better moral order sometimes outruns yours and mine! It is not enough to say a man is a Christian because he gives himself completely to raising the level of morality in society.

What, then, is the tell-tale mark?.....

.....what is the sure sign?.....

....what is the undeniable evidence of a Christian?

You have it, my friend, in the text....

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

.....the surest evidence is the spirit which lays hold upon a man.....

.....it's the accent of his life

.....it's the quality of his life

.....it's the contagion that comes to a man, once he has been laid hold upon by Jesus Christ himself.

( Now whether this will be a comforting thing for you or not, I'm not certain, but even the writer of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles has to admit that they did not know at first that Peter and John were Christian. Of course, they had performed the miracle! Of course, a crowd had gathered around and were marveling at this thing that was done. The first reaction of the crowd, and even the temple authorities, was bewilderment. They were startled by these men.

But the longer they were in the presence of Peter and John, and the more they talked, and the more they caught something of the accent of the lives of these

men.....then it was that it dawned upon them..

"Well, this is the answer---these men have the spirit of Jesus Christ!  
...this is the undeniable evidence! this is the sure trade-mark of a Christian!

And how do you get this spirit of Jesus Christ? You get it only as the text puts it----you are with Jesus---you spend time with Him .....and then He takes over and you automatically reflect what He allows you to know in your heart. It happens like that! It's something that you know in the cloister--it's something that you know in the quiet time.....

.....that's why, you see, again and again I beg with you--  
..I plead with you....to set aside more quiet time in your lives..  
.....such a limited thing as 15 minutes in the course of the day, when you keep company with Jesus Christ....

.....more time for the study of God's Holy Word---when something of His spirit is reflected from the written page....and the love of the truth of Jesus Christ shines upon your soul....

.....to keep company with Jesus Christ.

I remember in those first years following my graduation from college, like all alumni, I suppose, faithfully I returned to Alumni Day...and I used to pride myself with saying that when I'd seek out some of the freshmen, (they'd been on campus, now, two or three months, perhaps),...and I used to say to myself, --I can tell, now, when I see this freshman, just which of the three fraternity houses has claimed him....for in those years that I spent on that small college campus, each of the three fraternity houses happened to have distinctive traits and characteristics; and whether I was pre-judging or not, I shall not argue that point at this time here....but I used to think that just as I talked with some of those boys, I could discern the stamp of their fraternity house already placed upon them--just through association.

People have a way of reflecting the type of person with whom they associate. We who have been in Saint Luke Church on your staff, now, for several years, and have gotten to know you, the parents, quite well, discover every now and then that your child--your daughter, is beginning to think just the way you think, and to talk very much the way you talk. In some of these youngsters we can see their parents written all over their faces. Please don't misunderstand me, in some cases, it's not nearly as encouraging as we would like it to be. "They took knowledge that they had been with Jesus".....I beg of you parents---take your souls to task and ask yourself the question.....

.....what kind of an influence is being exerted upon my  
child through my demeanor---through my interest  
in the things of the Kingdom of God?

.....how well do I see people in their better light?

.....how favorably do I talk about the things of the Kingdom?  
...the program of Saint Luke Church?

Any time an unfortunate word is spoken, belittling and unfair, you work a hardship against an impressionable teenager. Association is that important! And I would use this pulpit as a confessional for the moment, when I tell you that there are certain people who have come to me, having reached the age of 40 and 50, when they are knowing great despair because it suddenly has occurred to them that they're going to grow old and reflect pretty much the traits and characteristics of their fathers and their mothers. This is the last thing in the world that some people would ever want to do---to become the kind of person that their parents have become....."They took knowledge that they had been with Jesus".....Association has a way of developing in the mind of someone else, a certain tell-tale characteristic.

It is not enough, I say to you who are parents, that you should allow your son or your daughter to see you only at your Sunday best in the name of Jesus Christ. This is only one hour out of all the hours of the week, and it can't possible be ef-

fective enough--and this is true even for the world.....the people with whom you associate tomorrow morning will not accept as undeniable evidence the fact of your Christian faith when you share with them a Sunday bulletin from Saint Luke Church--a kind of attendance card.....

.....an English naturalist used to make quite a bit of money by delivering a series of lectures that he had in which he told people how the traits of animals were unlike the traits of human beings; and then he had another lecture in which he said the traits of animals were very much like the traits of human beings. One lecture that he had told how a fish, swimming through the water, had a built-in sensory device by which even in the darkness he could tell when it was about to approach an object. Don't they tell us that bats flying in the night have a way of knowing where objects are and steer clear of them?.....

.....but then this professor had another lecture--about a spider and a fly. He said that it could be proved that if a spider would come upon a fly in his web, the spider would attack; and yet in a series of other tests, when a spider came upon a fly outside of its web, it would shy away--would not attack....as though, let's say for the purpose of this sermon, the spider could not recognize the fly apart from its web.

Now, if you wanted to, you could finish the sermon at that point. The deduction can be rightfully made that it's easy to recognize some Christians in the company of other Christians on a Sunday morning in an ecclesiastical setting such as this....but it's extremely difficult to recognize some people as Christians two blocks--two miles, away from a church door...one hour--one day, away from an assembly such as this. And yet, Peter and John were recognized as Christians, not because they were in church.....they were recognized as being possessed by the spirit of Jesus Christ in the midst of a hostile world, when the easiest thing in the world was to be anything else but possessed by the spirit of Jesus Christ. The world has a way of respecting undeniable evidence. Maybe the world is waiting for the undeniable evidence that only you can give.

October 15, 1961

"LESSONS FROM THE FIELDS"

On this day which marks the Festival of the Harvest, the sermon bears the title, "Lessons From the Fields." The text is the 7th verse of the 5th chapter of the General Epistle of James:

"Consider the farmer who with patience waits  
for the precious fruits until the early and  
latter rain."

It's autumn. The days are shorter. The leaves have begun to turn, they've begun to fall. The mornings can be foggy, the night air can be chilly. The farmers have brought the increase from their fields and the way-side stand along the country road is supplied and stocked with pumpkins, potatoes, and with apples.

The church takes seriously her obligation to remind her people that this time of the year in particular we have cause to remember that it is by the Lord's hand that we are sustained--it is by His bounty that our tables are spread. Properly and correctly, the committee here in Saint Luke Church has decorated the narthex, the window ledges and about the altar with the fruits of the good earth. And if there were no sermon to be preached today, and if you were simply to come and to sit, and to focus your eye upon the window ledge nearest you, you would have a sermon in itself. Here is evidence of God's providence. Here is a good sign that God in His own way works the miracle from the good earth---because He is good---because He wants us to be sustained.

We in suburbia in particular need to observe the Festival of the Harvest, the October-fest. We are far removed from the good earth. We go to the store, we buy our vegetables from the vegetable bin, carefully wrapped in cellophane.... ..scarcely a drop of the good earth showing anywhere. The flour that we purchase comes in a neat package, carefully refined. I used to think that the farmer al-



ways had an advantage of sorts---he lived nearer to the good earth...he had constantly a day-by-day reminder of God's providence. I grew up in a small town, as some of you know--scarcely 3,000 people....and at this time of the year when you'd be getting ready for the Festival of the Harvest, perhaps a Sunday or two in advance the pastor would make the announcement--"Will the members of the congregation please bring food-stuffs, that we might decorate the chancel, the window ledges, and that some of the abundance of the fields and of our gardens might be shared with institutions close by." With an announcement of that nature, almost every other family could bring, from its own garden, its food-stuffs. Almost any home, at random, that you might name, in my home town, had its garden.

Not so in Saint Luke Church! Perhaps one family out of every two hundred--maybe one family out of every three hundred in Saint Luke Church could have produced what you find in the window ledges, in the narthex, in front of the altar. This is suburbia. And because this happens to be true, we must concentrate as best we can upon the meaning of the Festival of the Harvest. The image of the farmer remains. In my small town I could walk to the edge of town and right there I could see the farmer at work in his fields, and right at the very edge of town, his farm of 140 acres. He rotated his crops---corn, oats, wheat, and he had his herd of milk-producing cows, had his chickens, his pigs, a few sheep....and always close by the farm house, the garden, where he saw daily the miracle. And all of his fields served as a panorama against which God was working, and he called it by name.

Not so for you and me in suburbia. The evidence is here, however, and let me transport you as best I can and as hurriedly as I can to the farmer in his fields. He knows certain lessons---lessons that are being taught to him directly. What are they?.....

.....Lesson # 1: Even though he may be dependent upon the hand of God, there are some things that God Himself will not do until the farmer has first done

his part. Long before there's an autumn---long before there's the gathering of the crops.....

....the land must be cleared

.....the land must be plowed

.....the seed must be carefully chosen

.....the seed must be properly planted

.....and the field must be cultivated...and always a concern  
for the pesky weed.....these things must be done when

they should be done--that's lesson #2....

....Lesson #1.....God does not act until man has first done his part.

....Lesson #2.....What man must do must be done when it should be done.

(Even God has an economy by which He operates. Even God has a schedule which He must keep. Seeds sown in August cannot guarantee a crop in September. What must be done in the springtime of the year must be done then. Now carry that over, if you will, as a lesson for all of life. ....most applicable, for the moment, to those of us who are parents--we who have children. In the time schedule which God allows us, there are some things which we as parents must do. We never have full-grown children dropped in front of us. The young man of eighteen has seventeen years and eleven months before him before he approaches the immediacy of his eighteenth year. In the plan of God, we who are nearest that child, we who are nearest that youngster, have certain things that must be done at a particular time, and if they're not done at that particular time, we cannot guarantee good and honorable results.

In the life of a youngster there are certain things that must be done when he is eight years of age and if they're not done when he is eight, they can never be done again. You cannot do for an eighteen year old what should have been done

when he was six. In the plan of God there is a time schedule, there is a calendar that must be obeyed, that must be respected, that must be kept. I don't know of any more excellent example than the example that comes from the farmer and the fields and the springtime when the seed must be sown. The farmer would also remind us that for the best possible crop, the soil must also receive good consideration. It cannot be neglected, once the seed has been sown.)

....Lesson #3....is this, that once the man, the farmer, has done his part, there comes a time when he simply must wait....wait for the latter--wait for the early rain---wait for God to do His part. Some scientist has observed that even in the raising of a crop, what man does amounts to perhaps only 5%---95% of it depends upon the alchemy of the soil, the fertility of the seed, the sun, the wind, the rain--the process of maturation which requires its own time. Even in this dealing with life itself, it can be maintained that not even man can force the hand of God. God takes His time. This is the lesson, perhaps the most salient lesson that comes to us from the farmer and his fields.....patience. One must wait.....one must wait.

The longer I am in the ministry, the more I am convinced that this is one of the most precious things that you and I could ever know---to possess patience. We need it on so many fronts. Take as an example our world of international relationships. How long have we had the United Nations?....and how often do you hear people today, in this critical time, saying...."It shall be scrapped! -- No use!".....to speak so soon about this world forum which is the only place today in this world where men of all nations can come together.

It's a columnist in yesterday's paper who spoke, I think, quite truthfully when he says that this is the lesson that America will have to learn. For generation after generation, a crowning virtue of America was her impatience. Her land had to be cleared....one frontier after another had to be claimed...one city after

another had to be built. She could hardly wait. You ask almost any person who lives anywhere else but America the characteristic of the American mind in years gone by, and he'll be quick to say she is an impatient people, because America has been a young nation---young in contrast with many other nations on the face of the earth. And to be impatient is the characteristic of the adolescent. While this may have been our virtue in generations gone by, the virtue we need now is patience.....

.....lest we become trigger-happy

....lest we force all other people to our mould--to our way of thinking---to our type of enterprise. We need patience.) We need to be content.

Let me plead with you at once---to have no confusion in your thinking that patience means appeasement. It doesn't. Patience means to stand firm....

....to be rooted and grounded, solidly

.....believe inherently what is true as you know it in your heart

....to know full well that come wind or weather, this purpose of the

Eternal that you enshrine in your heart will have its hour.

....this is not to give way to appeasement---this is simply to be firmly rooted.

It was an interesting thing to hear a conversation about a man who perhaps is the most distinguished churchman of our day---who is head and shoulders above all of us put together.....and I said to a man who served on an executive board with him---"What must it be like to attend a board meeting, when you deal with a giant of his stature?---he who knows so much---he who seems always to be right?" Thank God for leadership of that caliber!

The man simply replied--"Somehow or other, he seems to wait patiently until we get around to his way of thinking....he's willing to wait, until this truth dawns upon us, as we know it has dawned upon him. And in the meantime, he doesn't

give a bit."

Maybe this is what you and I must learn--to be rooted and grounded firmly, so that with patience we can keep our stand. It has to be done in the world of international relations. It has to be done even when you think about your own soul. It takes time to become spiritually respected; but you and I become impatient--we even want to become a saint overnight. We get on our knees and we expect God to go into action at once. We expect God to perform the miracle, and then once the miracle is performed, that's everything. But there are some things that God teaches only as we allow Him time to get through to us.

(It's patience we need when we deal with other people. Some people can't take giant steps forward in the Kingdom. Some of you can outrun others, with leap and with bound. Some of you, because of the very nature of your personality, your temperament, will drag yourself along, limping, as it were, toward the Kingdom of God...but thank God your direction is right! And it requires patience on our part to wait....this is the thing that we need.

I used to think--whether or not I would maintain this now, I don't know.. ...I used to think that you name any problem that may concern you, that may vex you, and I used to think that it could be won, conquered--through patience. When I think of all the homes that I have seen broken--where deterioration has set in between man and woman....I'm convinced to think that in many, many cases it need not have been, if only the measure of patience had been exacted. When I think of children, in the impressionable years of their age, who are misunderstood by their parents---just because the parents run out of patience; and the irreparable harm and damage that's done upon fragile soul of a teenager, because many parents expect their teenagers to become adults overnight.)

What would happen if God dealt with us as impatiently as we deal with other

people? What would happen if God consigned us to Hell as instantaneously as you and I mark some people off the record. Consider the farmer....let me paraphrase it for you.....

.....he does his part---he does it well

....then with patience he waits---for God to do the rest.

\* \* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as delivered)

October 22, 1961

"WHEN THEY HAD PRAYED"

The sermon bears the title, "When They Had Prayed." It is based upon the 31st verse of the 4th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And when they had prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to preach the word of God with boldness."

You ought never to take one passage of Scripture by itself and say this is the whole truth and nothing but the truth; but rather you ought to take this one passage of Scripture and super-impose it against the passage which begins the series in which this passage is found. I am saying to you that any verse of Scripture should be understood properly in its context. This is the kind of thing, I am reasonably certain, that Dr. Lenski has been saying again and again as he has met with us on Wednesday evenings.

This is most certainly true of the passage of Scripture which serves as the basis for today's sermon. I have simply given you the one passage out of several, and you can't possibly understand this one passage unless you understand what happened before. This passage, which serves as the text, is the account of men who prayed.....and after they prayed they became very, very bold and courageous, and they were filled and captivated by the Holy Spirit. But you're mistaken, my friend, if you think it happened just like that. It did not.

Now let us go back a few verses.....you can read it for yourself later in the day....and see what had been going on. They had been held captive, these men and women who took the name of Jesus Christ. The authorities of the church and of the state were constantly harassing them on every side. No matter where they went, they were marked people. Everything they said was being held against them. Now, after having been held by the authorities for a while, the authorities couldn't find any really valid cause for which they could hold them any longer. So they released them.

The more I study this, the more I am amazed at the type of person who made up the Christian church in its infant days. They were always getting into trouble, and yet they were always bouncing back. They would try to quiet them--they would hold them in captivity, and as soon as they were released, they started all over again. How do you account for this? Why were they, of all the people, so remarkable? If it weren't for the fact that we have a vantage point of two thousand years, and we can see the whole story and say it's because they were possessed by Jesus Christ and His Spirit, I would hardly believe that such a thing had actually happened...and that there was such a human being living here on earth. We do have this vantage point.

But it's this passage of Scripture, then, super-imposed against the other verses, that helps us to understand why the early Christian was as remarkable a person as he was. Let's look at it now.....

....Step # I.....you find the early Christian being taken captive; and once he's released from custody, it's a very significant thing to discover what he now does. He goes immediately to his friends. When he meets with his friends he tells them unhesitatingly about everything that has happened....what the authorities said, and what the authorities did. But you say to yourself very quickly---there's nothing strange about that. Men have a way of running to each other. Don't criminal authorities tell us that when that most-wanted man is being searched for, one of the things he will try not to do will be to get in touch with his former associates, because the law knows very well that this is the thing that he wants most to do...and if they start spreading a net anywhere, they invariably include his former friends and associates. On a base as low as that, human nature is made of the kind of stuff where a man wants to be with his friends.

.....but this is more than a superficial judgment that I am sharing with



you, as far as these Christians were concerned. The friends that they sought out were not superficial, casual acquaintances. The friends to whom they went as soon as they were released from custody were the kind of people in whom they had great faith and trust---people that they had come to know---people that they had come to respect---people in whose presence, without any reservation whatsoever, they could lay bare their souls...talk about their fears, their failures and their frustrations....talk about their dreams and their hopes and their ambitions.....and would know at once that they would not be misunderstood. They would not be repelled.

....when I try to understand why these early Christians were as remarkable as they were, I have to begin at this point.....every single one of them had a circle of friends to whom they could go again, and ever so often. I say to myself, rather quickly, that this is one of the unfortunate things about your generation and mine. Ah, it isn't that we don't know people--we are, I suppose, the most socially adjusted people to constitute any generation of Americans. We know how to be polite, we know how to be courteous, we know how to greet people.....but when it comes to knowing people in depth, ...when it comes to having an encounter with another person, mind-to-mind and spirit-to-spirit and soul-to-soul---we are lacking very much in this respect. This was one of the prize elements in the life of the early church....every Christian looked upon any other Christian that he had come to meet as a friend in depth....you can keep saying that over and over again, my friend----in depth.....to realize what a priceless ingredient this is for life.

...A man can almost count on the fingers of one hand the number of people that he may know to whom he could go unhesitatingly in any time of trouble or great joy and lay bare his soul, and hope to find in and through that friend some kind of comfort, courage and consolation. This is an indictment

against contemporary man---that so much of our relationship with people is superficial--casual--polite. There are some things that you and I need most in life that will come to us only as we find them through the heart and the soul and the mind and the spirit of another human being. You can't possibly write the story of the early Christian church without writing in large letters the tremendous truth that they locked upon each other as a friend.

(....I don't mind telling you--the thing that I covet most, I think, for myself in my relationship with you, as the Pastor of this congregation, isn't primarily that I might become an effective preacher, as much as I should like to become an effective preacher....

.....the thing that I covet most for myself isn't so much that I might become an able administrator, as essential as administration is this day in the life of the Christian church, organized as she is....

....I would like very much to become a qualified interpreter, Bible scholar and teacher---important as this is....

.....but I think I would have to say the thing that I want most would be to be recognized by you as a friend--a Pastor to whom you could come in any kind of difficulty...and if I did nothing else but serve as a listening post for God, I would justify my existence as the Pastor of Saint Luke Church. The longer I live, the more I am convinced that there is a deep-seated hunger on the part of people to be able to trust someone---to confide....if that person were to be nothing else but a listening post.)

....I shan't<sup>"</sup> hesitate to tell you--I spent a portion of the week at Mar-Lu-Ridge....Wednesday--Friday.....if you were to ask what I would consider the salient features of that retreat of the worthy band of young people from this parish, I could name a number of them....

.....Bible study session when I heard them react in a

way that would do credit to any group of young people--  
the questions they raised--the things they couldn't  
quite understand---the things that comforted them  
.....to meet on the side of a hill overlooking the valley  
and to share a closing worship service with them was  
an experience worth traveling many, many miles...

....but for me personally, as meaningful as any of this, if not a little  
bit more so, was the time that I spent in a little room where I made myself  
available to any teenager who wanted to come, and look upon his Pastor as a  
friend. I count it a priceless thing to remember the experiences that I had  
with at least three of them. There is need in this world to develop what may  
be referred to as friendship in depth. A great man was once asked, "What do  
you consider the secret for your success?"....he answered, "I had a friend."

....going back to this passage of Scripture now, reading all the ver-  
ses, we discover that after they were released from custody, they went to  
their friends, and they told them everything.

....The second thing that happened when they went to their friends was this:

Together they remembered what happened to their Lord Jesus. Christians are  
people who keep reminding themselves of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.  
Christians are people who focus their mind and their thought upon Jesus, and  
they know great comfort when they can come together with a group of people who  
want to do this together.

.....when we come together we talk about any number of things. I am ashamed  
of myself, quite often, when as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, I meet  
with so-called Christian people, and the burden of our conversation is spent  
so easily on the trivial things of life--the ephemeral, that has no lasting  
value whatsoever, and Jesus Christ gets very little attention at all.

When these early Christians came together, they were always talking about Jesus, and one of the things that meant a great deal to them was to recite for themselves how He suffered and how He died. They were knowing affliction, they were knowing persecution, and it was a source of comfort when they could remember that Jesus Christ did not escape.

...One of the things that vexes many people today is why do they have to endure pain and suffering?...why does life have to deal so treacherously with them? Christians say, we can't understand it, but we can remember that even Jesus Christ was not made free of such suffering.....and I suppose they must have said to themselves, if He couldn't escape it, why should we think that we can? They drew a measure of inspiration by remembering what had happened to Him.

.....I have gone to a Roman Catholic church in the course of the day, and I have seen men and women doing the stations of the Cross. They finger their rosaries, they kneel and they pray, as they move from one station to another. And while I would not recommend such practice in Saint Luke Church, I can very easily recognize at once the merit that comes from it. When a devout penitent has been assured that his sins have been forgiven--he has been told to leave the confessional booth and to make his prayers and to remember what our Lord Jesus Christ endured on the way to the Cross.....and as he himself recalls what happened to Jesus Christ, he gains a measure of courage to go on. As our Lord was strengthened---so shall he be strengthened.

.....We don't have the stations of the Cross in Saint Luke Church, but admirably and properly so, when the designs for the stained glass windows were chosen, what do we have as the subject of these windows?---you ought to know it by heart, as often as you come here and look at them.....you have one chapter after another in the life of Jesus Christ.....and the Christian should be

the kind of person who constantly reminds himself that Jesus Christ came into the world, identified Himself with the world, suffered at the hand of cruel man, and died. As God did not forsake Him, God will not forsake us.

.....The third thing that happened to these early Christians when they came together.....

.....they told each other about their pain and their persecution...

....together they remembered what had happened to their Lord....

....and then, together, they prayed. Every time the early Christians came together, it seems as though they had a prayer meeting, permitting themselves rightfully and properly to believe that far more important than what they said to each other was what they together said to God, and what they together heard God say to them. If I were to sit in judgment on Saint Luke Church, I think I would have to echo the same kind of judgment that any pastor could make against almost any congregation---and that is, we don't pray enough together. What a priceless thing it would be in this congregation if any one of us, faced with a terrible temptation, could seek out maybe eight or ten of us, and say...."Won't you meet---and the only thing I want you to do is to pray with me.".....how the life of this parish could be transformed!

.....When the early Christians got together, prayer was always a part of their gathering. They always prayed for each other. Let me ask a question... ..how many other people, members of Saint Luke Church, are on your prayer list? ....how many times have you ever experienced the lifting up of the spirit and you have been able to say to yourself..."someone must be praying for me"?

These early Christians went back to the world, they spoke with boldness, they spoke courageously for Jesus Christ.....they lived, they suffered, they died for Him.....and one of the reasons why they were able to do it was that they were willing to believe that always somewhere there was someone

lifting them up in prayer.

I tell you I am impressed by the remarkable character of the early Christians. The more I read about them, the more I understand them, the simpler the explanation becomes---as simple as all this:

....they had founded a depth in their friendship with certain people

....they went to them quickly and shared their fellowship...

.....and again and again---they prayed.

.....small wonder, then, that this passage of Scripture ends with these words.....

"When they had prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to preach the word of God with boldness."

\* \* \*

Johannes Weiss:

"A tempestuous enthusiasm, an overwhelming intensity of feeling, an immediate awareness of the presence of God, an incomparable sense of power and an irresistible control over the will and inner spirit and even the physical condition of other men - these are ineradicable features of historic early Christianity."

(Vol. I Pages 42-43)

October 29, 1961

"THE MEANING OF REFORMATION"

The sermon bears the title, "The Meaning of Reformation," and as a background and only as a background, for the sermon today, is the first verse of the Gospel lesson for the day, John 8:30:

"If ye continue in my word, then shall ye be  
my disciples indeed."

It's a very unfortunate thing that the meaning of Reformation is not always clear to people; and even those of us who claim the Reformation tradition are not always certain as to just what we ought to understand by it. It's the purpose of this sermon to offer an attempt on my part to think anew concerning the basic meaning of Reformation.

Let me begin in this fashion. The Reformation, as such, is never to be considered primarily as a revolt. A revolt leads to a revolution and a revolution leads, sometimes, to something that is brand new--radically different--from anything that went before. You cannot call the Reformation, as such, a revolution.

Whether you have recognized it or not, I cannot say, but Martin Luther himself never considered himself a leader of a revolution. Martin Luther, of whom we think particularly today, wanted so much to remain within the Church. It was they---and I say it again---it was they who excommunicated him. Martin Luther took issue with what the church was teaching. Martin Luther took issue with what the church was practicing. But Martin Luther did not take issue with the Church as such. Or I had better put it this way---he did not take issue with the Christian faith....rather it was the Christian faith that he wanted to promulgate---it was the Christian faith that he wanted to safeguard.

I say this to you with complete candor, and with an equal measure of remorse

on the part of my soul, which I hope would be matched by remorse on your soul as well....the Christian Church and the Christian faith have not always been synonymous in history, and there have been periods in the history of the Christian Church when she was not true to the Christian faith.

There have been periods in the history of Christianity when those cast outside the Church have been closer to the spirit of Jesus Christ than the leadership itself of the established Church. Remember the reference that I made several Sundays ago to John Huss of Bohemia, before the time of Martin Luther, what he was declaring, what he was preaching....and the Church itself shook its finger and said, "No! You must be silent"....and the Church itself ordered that he should be burned at the stake.....and as he died--what they classified as the torment of the damned--which they had deliberately inflicted against him, we have reason to believe he drew closer and closer to the very gate of Heaven itself. And all the time this was taking place, he was outside of the Church. They who caused the flames to leap up around his body were the leaders of the church in that day. Even though John Huss, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich von Zwingli and a host of men that you could name, even three hundred years before the 16th century....  
..while they were speaking against the Church, they were not interested in establishing a revolt as such. It wasn't anything brand new that they wanted to create. Whatever you understand by Reformation, you ought to begin at that point.

The second thing that we ought to understand as we clear the ground for the moment is that the Reformation, as such, was not a return to Christianity of the first century. I used to think it was! I used to think that Martin Luther and Company were simply calling the Christian Church back to what the church was at the very beginning. Because I thought that even as recently as a few months ago, thinking of Reformation Sunday, I was tempted to entitle this sermon, "Return to the Reformation" ....now after hours of study and preparation for this sermon,



I frankly admit to you, that would not have been a good sermon!--because it would have had a bad title.

Reformation, essentially, is not a return--a going back. If ever a man returns to something and he goes back to something, he might have something less than what he ought to have in the present situation. He may return away from... ..it doesn't necessarily follow that you ought to return back. Jesus Christ will always be a contemporary. Jesus Christ could not be someone who existed back in a century once upon a time ago.

And this is part of the quarrel that I have with the Roman Catholic Church today.....

....parenthetically, I add at once---don't misunderstand me when I say a quarrel....I should say, perhaps, a failure to appreciate, because in an hour such as this, with the world as critical as it is, it doesn't become anyone who takes the name of Christ to quarrel overmuch with anyone else who takes the name of Christ. I can't possibly find it in my heart to pick up stones and cast at anyone whose Christian label may not be as the label that covers my commitment.....

....but I'll say to you again, I can't possibly appreciate that the Roman Catholic Church says...."Come back - - return to Rome" ....and if you visit St. Peter's in Rome, and you stand there in St. Peter's Square, even architecturally the colonnades that come out from the portico of St. Peter's, so the tourist guide would tell you, stand like this, as a design, as a symbol---that the Roman Church is waiting for all those who take the name of Christ to return. I have little interest in returning back.

Let me say it just as quickly---I have no interest right now in returning even back to the Reformation period as such.....to go back is to go back. This is not always good. It's the assignment of the Christian Church to keep up with Jesus

Christ. It's the assignment of the Christian Church today to apply the spirit of Jesus Christ to the contemporary scene.....not to go back to the pattern of another generation, or another period of time, and say -- "This we must super-impose completely and perfectly upon today." This cannot be done. Frederick Schliermacher, as much as one hundred years ago, said, "We must continue the Reformation principle" .....we must continue.....we must keep up with it---not necessarily go back. You might want to recapture its spirit, but even that word 'recapture' means to hold and to retain and it, in itself, is alien to any interpretation of the word 'spirit.' The word 'spirit' ought to be understood as something that's let loose--vibrant---pulsating--possessing. The meaning of the Reformation is the recognition of a principle, and that principle does not create revolt. That principle does not necessarily mean a return to a former pattern.

(The meaning of Reformation is essentially this: a continuing re-examination of the Christian faith and the application of Christian truth to my day and to my situation. I get terribly impatient with Protestant ministers, and Lutherans in particular, who go to a pulpit on Reformation Sunday and try to fight all over again the battle of the 16th century. Ours is the responsibility to fight the battle of 20th century Christianity. As I stand before you now I would say, quite earnestly, that everything that I am sharing with you now I would share with my brethren of the Protestant tradition, even before I would confront my Roman Catholic brethren with it.....the meaning of Reformation is a continuing re-examination, according to Biblical truth, against the belief and practices of my church today.)

You see, it was this principle that meant so much to Martin Luther when John Tetzel came, close to the confines of his parish in Wittenberg...Martin Luther heard what was going on. And John Tetzel came, representing the Pope---a church had to be built in Rome.....

....and I'm willing to admit, the most magnificent church in all

Christendom, so I would think it, in splendor and majesty...I have never seen anything to equal it, in all Christendom...St. Peter's in Rome. As a tourist it might leave you cold. As a tourist you might be annoyed because there aren't enough people worshiping. When you recognize the symbol that it has been to the Christian religion, it is enough to make you bow your head.

Ah, it wasn't a bad thing that St. Peter's should have been built....

.....Martin Luther as a faithful priest of the Church, re-examined for his day how St. Peter's was being built. And John Tetzel came selling pieces of paper, and men and women bought pieces of paper and they paid good money; then they went their way and they said, "My sins are forgiven because of the money I have given.".....and if you see the picture tonight of MARTIN LUTHER you may remember, even if you've seen it before, that walking down the streets of Wittenberg the faithful priest, the faithful monk of Wittenberg sees a drunk lying in the gutter.....and with that shepherd's soul of his, Friar Martin says, "You'd better get around to confession!" ....the drunk pulls from underneath his cloak a piece of paper and says----"Father Martin, I don't have to go to confession any more---this piece of paper is enough." It was because Martin Luther re-examined what was taking place in his day that he said....."This is contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ" .....that he became enraged and spoke out against the Church of his day, only because he was speaking in favor of the pure Christian faith.

Now today this is your responsibility and my responsibility. How true are we to the basic principle of the Reformation? Let us in Saint Luke Church, let us as Protestants, let us, people who take the name of Jesus Christ, continue to re-examine our faith, our belief and our practice---to see whether or not they are true to Biblical foundation and to the spirit of Jesus Christ. This type of thing has to go on, one generation after another, one generation after another, I say.

The Reformation can never belong to one period and then all the rest of us coast along because of them. The Reformation principle must be continued. The Reformation principle belongs to all Christians....and when it is lost, the Church suffers.

For after it's all said and done, Jesus Christ is the Great Reformer, and the church belongs to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ will not, for long, allow its abuses to continue. Jesus Christ Himself will see that they are corrected. Every now and then Jesus Christ reaches for a man, and He puts him down in the midst of his people...He gives him the reformer's spirit. Today when the Church, in the book of some of us, is too highly organized, in a day when the Church has to spend so much of her time and energy just to keep a program alive and her doors open, who knows how much of the reformer's zeal we need right now.....to test everything that we do---

...is this being true to the spirit of Jesus Christ?

and what is more,

...are you supporting--are you participating because you are

constrained by the spirit of Jesus Christ to do these things?

Again and again the Church must re-examine herself. Now I go back to the text which serves only as an introduction, only as a background. Jesus Christ is saying to those who have come after Him, who take His name.....Jesus Christ is saying to anyone who bears the label 'Christian' -- regardless of his subtitle --

"If you continue in my word, then you shall be my disciples indeed."

There's one black mark after another in the history of the Christian Church, where she has not continued in His word.

The meaning of Reformation is this: a continuing re-examination .....

...to see whether or not all that we believe, all that we practice,  
is in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

\* \* \* \*

November 5, 1961

"CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY"

As previously announced, the sermons for the most part this year in Saint Luke Church are being preached upon passages of Scripture from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Today's sermon bears the title, "Christian Community," and the text is the 32nd verse of the 4th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul, neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."

A 20th century preacher standing in the Christian pulpit at this moment, about to preach a sermon upon this text, ought to say at once that any identification of this text with modern-day Communism is purely coincidental. It's a very unfair thing, a very unhistorical thing, for any man to say that the Marxist doctrine for the economic order is based upon a passage from Scripture. Present-day Communism and this type of living among the early Christians is far apart as night is from day, the difference is just as great. To begin with, what you have here in the early Church was a voluntary effort--people motivated by love to share. This is not true under a godless dictatorship, where by force what a man may have is taken away from him in order that it might be divided, arbitrarily, by somebody else. At first blush, this may appear as though this were a substantial basis for Communism, but it is not so.

But the purpose of this sermon is not to deal with an economic treatise this morning. It is simply to call your attention to the fact that when the Church was young, the religion of these early Christians was so vital that it would spill over into their every relationship that they knew in life. There was nothing that claimed them where they could not talk about Jesus Christ. As they came to pray

together, as they came to sing God's praise together, when the service of worship was over, there wasn't a one of them who said to himself, "Now you go your own merry way, and whatever happens to you between now and next Lord's Day is no concern of mine" ....they did not talk like that. Once the benediction had been pronounced, a continuing interest in each other would manifest itself in every aspect of life, and this bond that drew them together was so strong that it even expressed itself in the economic order. Each man said, "Why, whatever it is that God has given me in these world's goods--they don't belong to me---- they belong to everybody else that takes the name of Christ.....come, I'll share with you." The thing that compels our respect for the moment is this: that here was a unifying force that was so vigorous that it spilled over into every phase of life, even their social and their economic order.

Can you imagine a compelling force here in Saint Luke Church as great as that?---that would enable each one of us to believe that when the service of worship was over, that you and I had some kind of responsibility for continuing an interest in the people who sit in front of us, in the people who sit behind us, in the people who are here at 8:30, in the people who come here at 11:00 o'clock .....even in the people who might not be here at all on this one given Sunday.... ...can you imagine a force as great as that?....within a Christian community, whereby the individual believer would say---"Anything and everything that I have belongs to you, and whatever you need, is as a burden on my soul."

How do you get Christian community like this? Granted you wouldn't care to go this far---granted, of course, that you want to keep control of your own bank balance---and granted, of course, that you want to keep sacrosanct certain hours of your time, and certain departments of your life that you wouldn't think of sharing with anybody else.....but how is it that the early church was able to be characterized by a unifying force that enabled every single worshiper to be-

lieve that the other man's life was somehow bound up with his, and his with him?

Well the answer is a very simple one....

"and the multitude of them that believed were of one  
mind and one spirit - - "

....because each man knew that every other man had professed faith in Jesus Christ. They were one in mind and spirit because each one of them was one in Jesus Christ. This was a unifying force---this is what gave them a sense of Christian community.

It's because we want to be true to this principle that every time a New Members Group is formed, whatever other variety there might be in that group, the beginning session is always the same. Some of you may remember it quite well. I hope you may never forget it.....

....We begin in this manner.....

".....We are here tonight because of our interest in Jesus Christ. To become a member of Saint Luke Church is not to make a Protestant out of a Roman Catholic (and this is true, that any number of groups have several, perhaps, who come to us by way of the Roman Catholic Church).....

"....our interest in being here is not to make a Lutheran out of a Baptist, a Methodist or a Presbyterian (so great is the complexion of any New Member Group).....

".....and our coming together tonight is not simply in the interest of adding another name on the parish register of Saint Luke Church...."  
We do not begin at any one of these points.  
We begin at this point.....

".....We are here because of our interest in Jesus Christ....and if you desire to love and serve Him better with us, then we will talk about membership in this congregation."

.....Now that's very much the intention of the opening remarks at any New Members Class.

Perhaps you've observed in recent times, when we have a Confirmation for our young people on Pentecost---we've made a modification in the service.....

....after we have followed the ritual as ordained by the Church in the book, then we invite two of them to come at a time before the altar  
...and then this question is directed to them---

"Do you love the Lord Jesus? and are you willing to  
serve Him in His Holy Church"?

This is what characterized the early Christian congregation....whenever they came together and looked at each other, they knew one thing - -

"He loves the Lord Jesus....he's claiming God's promises  
through Christ! He knows himself a sinner saved by grace!  
That 's what that man is.....that 's what I am!"

....and from that point on, they had a sense of  
Christian fellowship and community.

Beloved, think what would happen in this hour of worship right now if somehow you could get over and above to this principle where you could say to yourself....."This person alongside of me---I don't know him!....this person in front of me--this person behind me---I don't know him!--where he works, his temperament, his personality, his background, his experience----I don't know him!..... But this I do know---He's a child of God...he believes in Jesus Christ....he and I are the same stripe!"

.....then there would be a sense of unity, a oneness prevailing throughout this entire worship experience that would transform our coming together. Whether you're able to achieve this or not, I can't tell, but I know one thing---Pastor McVicker or I, either one of us, is supposed to achieve it, because the liturgy of the Church designs it....the salutation that we have for you in the opening order of worship is this....."Beloved in the Lord - - " ....and that's the salutation that's applicable for every single one who is present here. This is the



bond of our unity....God loves you

God loves you

God loves you....

"Beloved in the Lord"--each one of us!

God doesn't love you one bit more than He loves the person in front of you....

..He doesn't love the person behind you one bit less than He loves you....

...The early Church had it---the sense of unity in the bond of Christ.  
When they had it this way, they had it this way. It was a vertical relationship  
that expressed itself horizontally.

"....if Christ is your Elder Brother, if Christ is my  
Elder Brother, then we are brothers together."

"....if God is my Heavenly Father, if God is your  
Heavenly Father, then we are His children together."

....this is what they had, and it was so real, it was so genuine, that  
they said, "It has to express itself in all phases of our life" - - and it even  
spilled over into the economic order. It's explained in this way, when they say  
they thought the return of Jesus Christ was an imminent thing--that pretty soon  
He was going to come back and establish His reign on earth, and because it was so  
near, they said, "Well why don't we begin to practice Heaven on earth right now,  
with everything?".....and each man came and said, "What I have belongs to you.  
I shouldn't think of keeping it for myself." If only each of us could command  
this kind of respect in the eyes of other people!

One of the very precious things about the small group meetings that we have  
at Bethany is this sense of fellowship that prevails. I don't know of any other  
place in the life of our church where it's matched, unless it happens to be when  
we come to the Communion table. When we meet in small group sessions at Bethany  
where we want to confront ourselves with Jesus Christ, there are some people who

come for the first time and they're shy, they're reluctant, they're hesitant. This is understandable---all of us seem to be afraid of something that we don't quite understand. It's human nature to shy away from something in which you've never fully participated, especially if it bears a religious spiritual stamp. But there are people who have told me that they have only to be in Bethany for five minutes, until they seem to sense a bond of oneness with all the other people who are present, notwithstanding the fact that they are, for the most part,-- they may not know any other person who is there, and by deliberate design we make it a practice never to begin a session by introducing each other--this comes at the end, because the paramount thing should be emphasized---every single person present is there because he loves the Lord Jesus....and each person who is present there is asked to respect the other person on that basis. )

This is what the Christian Church was meant to be from the very beginning-- a group of people who are respected for the fact that they love the Lord Jesus. What a tremendous responsibility this puts upon you and me, to be the kind of person who is respected for his love for Jesus Christ, because he reflects Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ is pre-eminent in your life, you are naturally drawn to somebody else where this is also true. And when Jesus Christ is pre-eminent in your life, you should be in duty bound to make up for the allowances in someone else's life, where He isn't nearly as real as He ought to be.

( I want to share with you an interesting illustration that came out of the monastery. Two monks were looking over the world. And the one monk says to the other, "What's the difference between those people out there and those of us who are here in the cloister?---we eat, we sleep, we drink, we do a day's work, we pray.....people out there in the world---they eat, sleep, drink, do a day's work---what's the difference?"

And the one brother monk said to the other brother monk, "It could be that

within our walls we have a sense of unity--a bond of fellowship that they don't have."

And the one brother monk says to the other, "And why should that be? Why do we have it and they don't have it? Why do I look upon everyone here in this monastery as my brother? Why shouldn't all those people out there look upon everybody else as his brother?"

The one monk says, "Maybe it's because they quarrel. Maybe it's because they don't know how to share."

And a wicked impulse comes to the one monk, and he says, "We've never known what that's like--to quarrel, and not to share. Let's try. Suppose you and I quarrel!"

And the one monk says, "I don't know how to begin."

And the other monk says, "Well, why don't we do it this way...let me take something that I have---let me take this crucifix. I will put it down here, and I will say, 'This crucifix is mine!' ....and then you will say, 'No, this crucifix belongs to me.' ....and so we will quarrel."

So they began. The one monk says, "This belongs to me!"

And the other monk said, "Well if it belongs to you, you keep it!"

When the spirit of Jesus Christ is so ingrained in human personality, ~~you can't talk, you can't think otherwise.~~

An outstanding asset to the Christian Church is her community---her fellowship---the willingness of her people to share of their life with somebody else. Make no mistake about it, that early Christian Church was made up of all kinds of people....poor, rich, Jew, Gentile, learned, illiterate, kind--other people, not so gracious.....but when it came to making the decision, each one of them tried to look at it in the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ according to him. This is the thing we want most for Saint Luke Church. This is why, ever so often, I've used this expression in your midst....'the Family of God which is known as Saint

Luke Church'....a sense of community.

It's interesting, these visits that some of our members are making on the homes of our congregation these weeks between now and the 19th. What a helpful thing it would be if every time a member of Saint Luke Church knocks on the door of your home, if he could say to himself, "Someone who believes in Jesus Christ lives here. Someone who loves Jesus Christ and is vitally interested in His Christian Church lives here. I shan't hesitate to visit with this person. I may not know him, I may not know his condition or circumstance in life, but I know that he loves the Lord Jesus or he wouldn't be a member of Saint Luke Church, and this is the basic criterion for membership."

And what a wholesome thing it would be if those of us who are on the inside of the home, and we hear the buzzer, the knock at the door, the ring of the bell, and we understand it to be a visitor from Saint Luke Church, and we would say to ourselves, "What a fine thing it is that this man is doing. He loves the Lord Jesus, and he's saying to himself that even his time isn't his own--even his time belongs to Christ, and he's taking his time to come and visit with me! He's using his energies and his talents to talk to me about the Kingdom of God through Saint Luke Church!"

.....What a grand and glorious thing it would be for this congregation if this oneness of spirit that we have in Christ would permeate every phase of our life. It becomes our greatest single asset. We will be poor indeed without it! We are doubly blessed with it.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul."

\* \* \* \*

Nicholas Berdyaev: "Communism should have a very special significance for Christians for it is a reminder and denouncement of an unfulfilled duty, of the fact that the Christian ideal has not been achieved .....Christian good has become too conventional and rhetorical and so the carrying out of certain elements of that good which is proclaimed in theory but very inadequately achieved in practice is undertaken in a spirit of terrible reaction against Christianity"

(This sermon transcribed as delivered)

"TWO BLACK SHEEP"

Text: "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira  
his wife, sold a possession,  
And kept back part of the price, his wife also  
being party to it - - " (Acts 5: 1-2)

The cynic would say at once, "I told you so! For human nature is human nature and it is a foolish thing indeed to think that all people will respond to the highest and best. At one time or another the baser element in man comes to the fore." So it would appear here. We have just been reading the Acts of the Apostles, and the chapter immediately preceding this one from which our text is drawn depicts a fairly idyllic state of the early church. Don't you recall the picture? They were of one mind and one spirit and had all things in common. Motivated by the love of Christ, every man shared fully and completely. The story is even continued in the fifth chapter where we are introduced to a man and his wife who in much the same grand style "sold a possession." And so we would be lead to believe that they, too, whoever they were, had been prompted by the same glorious emotion that characterized the other disciples. But alas - - it's a watered-down version of the better type and it is at this point that the cynic gleefully says, "I told you so! No matter how perfect the picture may be, make room for the black sheep, for eventually they will appear." For the sad fact remains that as others sold their property and poured into the central apostolic treasury the entire proceeds, these two held back a part. They did not play the game.

Of course, our immediate reaction is that we should draw a measure of comfort in realizing that human nature is human nature, and if standards of perfection could not be maintained by the early Christian Church, who are we to expect

anything better in our day? But I wouldn't draw too much comfort from it if I were you, since God still exacts a high standard. He establishes His Kingdom upon what is best and refuses to level off to whatever is inferior in men.

On the other hand, we could say to ourselves immediately that here again we come face to face with the basic honesty of the Bible and we are given reason in this passage to trust the Scripture record implicitly as being both honest and realistic. Some of us are willing to admit that the account of Ananias and Sapphira we might have been inclined to drop or to whitewash. Had we been writing scripture, we might have said to ourselves, "Why spoil the picture? They are only two people out of many, and a rare exception at that." But the Bible refuses to present an idyllic picture of anything. The facts must always be dealt with as the facts. What, now, can we learn from these two people?

First of all, dare we say that we can't expect sainthood at a bargain price. Let us again recall at this point what had been happening. The early Christians were so captivated by the love of Christ that they were motivated to share all that they had. The idea became rather popular and surely the well-being that was engendered by it must have brought a certain feeling of status (even though one hesitates to say it) to those who are able in this way to be numbered in the inner group. Could it be that Ananias and Sapphira wanted to enjoy something of this well-being? As Christian after Christian sold his property, so Ananias did the same. Dare we put it as someone once observed, that he, too, "wanted the prestige of generosity."? Nonetheless, he didn't want to share the whole price. While he gave the impression that he had given up possession of the property, he let them think that he, too, as the others, had deposited every penny of proceeds. The truth of the matter is that he did not, and Ananias is to be remembered more as a cheat than a liar. What a pity! For there is good in Ananias that should be

given its due credit. He was under no compulsion to sell and there must have been a certain attractiveness that Christianity made in its appeal to him. But who is it who says, "He wanted the prestige of being a partaker in the Christian community, but at a bargain price".)

(With this thought in mind, why don't you help me write this sermon. Would you put a paragraph or two in like this: that in our day there may be those of us who would believe that when we give God only momentary attention, we may beguile ourselves into thinking that all that He is and all that He has can be ours for only a few minutes a day. Two minutes of a morning prayer, in which we say, "God, watch over me this day. I shall be very busy.", and then the rest of the time is spent keeping God out of the picture completely, and sometimes by deliberate design. When this happens, we, too, may think that we can have God for a bargain price. Or would you say that when we give but an hour per week in seven days to Bible study and worship, that we can enjoy the full knowledge of His truth and love by giving so little time and concern? Would you be brave and daring enough to write a paragraph like this for your sermon: that when we fail to give Him considerably less than a tithe, we could be fooling ourselves into believing that all that God is and offers can be ours for so little? )

Let me move on with the sermon by telling you that it just isn't so, for God doesn't deal in bargains and heaven is not to be pictured as one huge discount center. Ananias is not only, and I say it facetiously, the "patron saint of liars" - - he is the one and the same time the cursed leader of all those who think they can enjoy the best without paying the fair and full cost. This is the grim reality which comes to many when in a moment of crisis they turn momentarily to God and you may think that in that sudden gesture, short, hurried as it may be, that they can make available for themselves the full treasury of heaven's resources,

in which they've never invested before.

( Let us turn now to Sapphira. In her we recognize the sinfulness of participation through acquiescence. It was Ananias who went presumably to the recorder's office; it was Ananias who signed the bill of sale; it was Ananias who discussed the detailed matters of price, date of possession, terms of payment, etc., and undoubtedly it was he who publicly handed over to Peter the money he had chosen to give; and all the while it was his wife who knew all about it and we have no indication that she objected to it or willed the whole matter to the contrary.

It would seem to me, and I hazard a guess, that of the two, the greater sin is that of Sapphira. Of course she was not the mastermind. She merely knew and consented.

It must be admitted that people who know and consent to evil and make no attempt to stop it provide the climate in which evil is continually perpetuated. And so we take ourselves to task for by and large we are to be numbered among those who never crusade against what is wrong; who prudently refrain from allowing their names to be used in support of some worthy cause, unpopular as it might be. )

So we focus our eyes upon Ananias and Sapphira. Ananias, the man who never intended to be all that he could have been, although willing to allow the pretense that he was. Here we stand in judgment before Almighty God who searches our heart and knows our mind. Here we stand in judgment before those whose deeds are pure.

( We recognize that in the full story, Ananias and Sapphira were stricken dead instantaneously. You may quickly respond by saying that you do not believe that such a thing could happen. Nonetheless, Ananias and Sapphira could come face to face with a sensitivity within the Christian family that once they saw themselves guilt-stricken as they were, they could no longer live. They were confronted by the judgment which they brought down upon themselves. This could be a far cry from the



rigidity of our Christian conviction, or, rather, lack of it, today. For one is tempted to recall the quotation in the Interpreter's Bible which touches upon this very matter - - "It is enough to note that there is nothing in the story to indicate that Peter killed either of them. The sense of their own guilt, coming upon them with the force of a shock that was vital, is enough to explain the event. It offends the temper of tolerance which we have cultivated in the Christian community." It goes without saying that there are some things that we just can't do--and live!)

November 19, 1961

"THE DANGER IN BEING CHRISTIAN"

The sermon, another in the series based on passages in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, bears the title, "The Danger in Being Christian," and the text is the 13th verse of the 5th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And of the rest, no one dared to  
join himself with them."

Among the many church buildings destroyed during the blitz of World War II in London was the famed City Temple. Plans were made for its reconstruction. A friend of mine was visiting in London and such rebuilding was taking place. He smiled to himself as he passed the structure for workmen had placed a sign over the main doorway as the work was progressing. The sign said, "Dangerous to enter."

Something of the spirit of that sign belongs over the entrance of every Christian church, if for no other reason, then certainly this--the type of thing which has been said for City Temple in London itself....it was a church that had giants in its pulpit--men like Joseph <sup>Parker</sup> Parker, John A. Hutton, Leslie Weatherhead.....

....men who had a way of troubling the souls of men and women who  
entered and came there to worship

....men who had a way of making people dissatisfied with the sinful  
souls that they were

....men who had a way of challenging them to have done with their  
evil ways and to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ

...men who entered at the risk, the divine peril, of having some-  
thing tremendous happen to them and through them.....

I say to you again---such a sign, "Dangerous to enter" rightfully belongs over the entrance of any church that is bent seriously on fulfilling its commitments to Jesus Christ.)

I give that to you on good authority, for that was the sign that belonged to the church when it was young. This very text indicates that...."and of the rest, no one dared to join himself with them"---simply means that they lacked the courage. Here was a challenge being laid down---they were not equal to it. Here was something, if once they would embrace it, they would embrace it at the peril of something happening to them and through them. To the day I die, I would want the Christian church to become a haven for the weary, and I would never want to die as long as somewhere I felt that while I lived the church no longer became a challenge to the stout in heart, and said...

"Here---come! We make great demands of you---demands the like of which no one else will make of you! Come!"

.....if on the outside there were those who did not come, the reason must be this---they lacked the courage. And I would say, God have mercy upon them!....but God, smile favorably upon your church, that her standards should be so high, that she could exact so great a price. This text indicates that when the church was young, she did proclaim a gospel that came as a challenge to people; but on the outside there were those who did not dare to join.

( I think the situation was the way it was for two different reasons. First of all, those who made up the early Christian church were men and women who for the most part had had some direct relationship with Jesus Christ. Their great preacher, Peter, as an example, had come under the direct influence of Jesus. He was one of the twelve. He remembered the price that his Lord exacted from him. He remembered the challenge that his Lord laid down in front of him and all the

rest who heart the Master Preacher...."If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me" ....this was the kind of thing that had been exacted from each one of them. This was the kind of price that each one of them was willing to pay. Human nature hasn't changed much in that respect. We have a way of expecting other people to meet the same standard that we ourselves have had to meet. The early Christian church was no exception in this regard. To become a follower of Jesus Christ when the church was young meant taking up a cross and paying very definitely the price of discipleship. This was the high standard that they were exacting from other people...."If you want to join us, then you join precisely the same way that we joined. We will not lower the standard. By the grace of God we met it, by the grace of God we expect you to meet it, too."

Let me take time to tell you a very interesting illustration. Some few years ago a church-related college had experienced a very destructive fire. Several of its buildings had been totally destroyed. Reconstruction was the order for the day. Naturally they appealed to their alumni and to the supporting congregations on the territory of the college. The congregation to which I now specifically refer had very few alumni from that institution, and so the college authorities presumably said, "We shan't expect much from that congregation". But they overlooked one very important thing. Lately come to that congregation was a young assistant pastor, recently graduated from his alma mater. He knew what his alma mater had meant to him, and to his generation. Sensing, perhaps, a lack of enthusiasm, he went to the senior pastor and asked for the privilege of assuming the role of director for funds in that congregation in behalf of the college.

He called together a group of men. He told them very plainly the story. They caught his enthusiasm, and before they went out to ring a single doorbell, every one of that group of men had subscribed to the campaign, and their subscrip-

tions had already reached the total for the congregation. The goal was reached before a single doorbell had been rung. The final story--that that congregation which had been presumably marked off, led the conference, and the funds gathered more than twice reached the goal and beyond. The reason? A very simple one..... ..each man who went out to confront somebody else was asking him to meet a situation which he himself had already met.)

The early Christians were men and women like that...."We know what it means to pay the price of discipleship. There is no cheaper way." When men and women were confronted by something like that, there were those who remained on the outside because they lacked courage. Do not forget, my friend, the same Lord who said, "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" also said, "If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me." Man becomes a Christian at so great risk and peril!

There is another reason why they exacted so high a standard from those who stood around them. The church had moved on in its history just long enough, now, as someone has said, that the bills were just beginning to come in, and payment had to be made, and they didn't have room for anyone unless he was willing, out of his resources, to help pay the price. Do you realize this simple truth--that the Christian church had reached a period in her history when she was at the verge of dying out, unless there was enough new blood coming in that could match the fervor and the devotion of the disciples themselves! This was the kind of challenge that they offered the world, and there were those who refused to enter because they lacked courage.

( I submit to you today, that if the church is weak today it's for this reason--we have never allowed people to fully understand that a man becomes a Christian at the risk and the peril of paying the price. It does cost something to become a Christian, and a man must pay.

He must pay first of all with time.....

....it takes time to come to church

...it takes time to pray

....it takes time to get a Sunday School lesson ready

....it takes time to plan a program...

...the Christian church has a right to confront people, not only with what the Christian church can give you, but to paraphrase it, with words none of us ought ever to forget----ask, not what your church can give you, but what you can give your church. For there's something even in the sight of God that begins to happen in a noble way, and a man comes forward to God and says...."Here I respond! ...here I give! ...here I offer! ...here I return! Take it, God--take it!" It costs something to become a Christian, and a man enters at the risk of having to pay the price. ) It requires time.

And the Christian church has a right to say to her people...."It's going to cost you something of your talent." The Christian church has a right to challenge a man like Richard Ahlberg, who shared with you so fervently his reactions. If a man can think, and a man can work with other men, the church has a right to say to him, "Give of your time and of your talent to Jesus Christ."

The church has a right to say it costs something in dollars and cents. The church has a right to challenge a man's pocketbook, for the simple reason, my friend, after it's all said and done, a man's heart has a way of following his pocketbook. We have a way of becoming interested in the things that we're asked to support. Do you remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ -- "He who loves much gives much." It's on that level that the Christian church has a right to challenge a man.

The Christian church has a right to say to a person..."You have a life--we want it---we need it! Come--give! If it's going to exact a price far higher than

you might have to pay elsewhere, we will still ask it."

(She's not here now. We expect her to be worshipping in this place at the 11:00 o'clock hour. A veteran of the cross of Jesus Christ...I have never known her equal. We in the Parsonage family have been privileged to know her for almost three decades. Young in heart, a representative of the Board of Higher Education once came to her town--laid before the young people in that community a challenge...

"Jesus Christ wants you! Jesus Christ needs you best!.....

.....she had decided to become a nurse, and because of her capabilities I think she could have been offered any position of worth and honor in that state, and with comparative ease. But as the train pulled out of the station, the words kept ringing in her ears, the ears of Kirsten Marie Jensen....

"Jesus Christ needs you and your best!"

Recently the President of Liberia honored her with a distinction which has seldom been given to any white woman. I was once asked to write a few words in appreciation of her basic character. Let me read them for you....

"I often think of her, and when I do, I see the picture of a woman wholly dedicated to the work of the Lord. I have never known a person whose zeal for the Kingdom was greater. <sup>Five</sup> Elephant ants might destroy her village, the heathen might burden her with their parentless children, her servants might prove unworthy of her trust, the fever may take its price, supplies might be delayed many, many months, converts may come very slowly....yet her faith remains firm and sincere. She deserves the title that they give her---"Jesus-woman."

...and it all happened because one day she heard someone say, "Jesus Christ will not settle in your life for anything less than the best." She answered the challenge.)

(<sup>Person</sup> ~~man~~ becomes a Christian, also, at the risk of keeping company with certain people. ~~He becomes a Christian at the risk of paying a price, he becomes a Christian at the risk--the glorious risk, of keeping company with certain people who~~

will always confront him with a higher standard. This is one of the glorious things about the Christian religion. Men and women in the Christian church should make it exceedingly difficult for a <sup>person</sup> ~~man~~, once he becomes a Christian, to go on his <sup>or she</sup> ~~his~~ way as a sinner. Once you become a Christian and you walk in the company of the redeemed, you should find it an extremely difficult thing to be something less than the person that God intends you to be. You become a Christian at the risk of always walking with people who have claimed you can become better than you are....you should become better than you are. This is one of the glorious things about the Christian religion. ) It surrounds you with the kind of person, who once you begin to walk with Him, you can never be satisfied with the type of person you were before you knew Jesus Christ.

( Beloved, I say to you, I shall no longer deserve the title of Pastor to you, the people of this congregation, when the day should come when I would no longer challenge you to become something finer and better than you are. If you should ever come to this place and I was standing in this pulpit, and you would go from this place forever satisfied, complacent, then I have failed. This church will fail you when, as a member of the Christian community, we no longer propose that you meet a higher standard. You will fail this church, you will fail Jesus Christ, when you no longer respond with what is finer and better in your total make-up. )

( One of the most glorious chapters in the history of the Christian church was when the writer of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles was able to say....

"And there were people who dared not join" ....because the standards were that high! It could be that when the writer of the 20th century records the tale of our day, we might say that Communism went as far as it has and as fast as it did because she required far more from her people than any other movement in this generation. This could be the damning thing that you and I may have to confront at the last day. )



"PETER'S SHADOW"

The sermon bears the title, "Peter's Shadow," the text from the 5th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the 14th and the 15th verses:

"And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Inasmuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them"

It's risky business, I say to you, to pre-judge any passage of Scripture, to allow yourself to believe that it isn't important. This is an admission that I'm making to you. For I say to you at once that the sermon that I'm about to preach I would not have preached in the first year of my ministry. With something of the rashness that belongs to the young preacher, I remember my reaction to this particular text.

I said to myself, "Why, it's only superstition! Here are people who have heard about a good man, and they bring the sick and the diseased, put them on the street, having placed them upon beds and couches, and hoping and praying that when a good man walks down the street, that just as he passes by, it will be his shadow that will work a beneficent thing..."

.....so in my rashness I passed this passage of Scripture by, granting it's only an element of superstition.

For shame upon my soul! I say. What right had I to treat a passage of Scripture like this? Shouldn't I have remembered that once upon a time there was a woman who came, in all of her shyness, in all of her timidity--bravely, boldly, however, into a crowd.....and she said to herself--"If I can but touch the hem of His garment, He will heal me!" .....And that's exactly what she did.

And I am constrained to remember that our Blessed Lord turned around and He said, (as though He did not know) ...."Who touched me?"

And to that woman He said ..."Your faith has made you whole."

To a woman who was even content to touch the hem of His garment, Jesus said....

"Even your kind of faith I will not ignore."

....and she was made whole from that very hour.

It's risky business, I tell you, to pre-judge any passage of Scripture--to permit yourself the unwise luxury of saying, "I can ignore this--I can treat it with indifference."

(Now, as I stand at this sacred desk, I can hardly wait to tell you what I want to tell you about this passage of Scripture. There are certain things that compel consideration. Let us begin at this point....

....the passage itself tells us certain things about the early Christians.

--they were a people who were making a dent upon society

--they were a people who could not be ignored

....they were vastly different than the contemporary Christian church. There are some people who say of us, that we have no relevance at all for the world; that out in the areas where serious thought and consideration must be given to great and perplexing problems, the voice of the church is passed by, is not even respected. There are people who say that that is true of us. We are recognized as being completely irrelevant to today's social order for any area of life which you might mention....

....when I read this text I say to myself....here was a group of people who could not be ignored. They were out in the open....and they went on preaching and teaching the good news of Jesus Christ, and the impression that they were making was so great that people came to hear them....they were drawn to them....they couldn't treat them with indifference.) That's the first thing that I have to say to myself.

( And the second thing that I have to say to myself is that among them was a towering figure....a giant in character....chief of all the apostles---Peter by name...

...a man whose reputation had preceded him as being a good man, a holy man....a man whose virtue was so great that there were people who were content to take the least of all blessings....

...."If I can't speak with him,

if I can't get his eye,

if I can't touch his hand,

I shall be content, then, to have his shadow

fall upon me."

.....How do you get such virtue? how do you get such greatness? that people would be willing to say that even the man's shadow can work a beneficent thing? )

That's something else about this text that intrigues me---it reminds me that when this happened these Christians were out in the open....they were either in the public square, or they were on the porch of the church, the synagogue or the temple. Now maybe, at first blush, that won't mean much to you, but you have to remember something that happened a short while ago. These same people had been taken into custody. They were humiliated, they were embarrassed....for the simple reason that they were telling people about Jesus Christ....and the authorities brought charges.....

...."You incite to riot

... "You are a public disturbance

...."You make too much noise!

...."You disturb the people....."

....they tried to pin something on them, but they didn't have anything that could stick. So finally they said....."You can go--you're free..." but I can just imagine the authority, shaking his finger at them and saying....."And let me tell

you one thing---if you don't shut up, and if we ever find you again  
out there in the public, we're going to bring you right back....

...we will harass you--we'll embarrass you....and if ever we have  
the slightest possible chance to bring any kind of a charge  
against you that's going to stick, you may rest assured it's  
going to happen!"

...As though this weren't enough, they even stoned some of the people.

Well now, against that background we find these Christians out in the public,  
doing the same old thing  
in the same old place  
for the same old reason.

This is the kind of thing that helps make possible a giant like Peter.

This is the way this type of character is born, and molded.

You may ask me some time...."Pastor, is it right for Christians to go  
underground?...when the pressure is so great, should we disappear  
for a time? --so that when the situation becomes better, we'll  
be able to talk then and do our work under more favorable  
conditions....."

I don't know how you might answer, and I don't know how I would answer.  
This is a very real problem for some people---it's a matter of life and death  
for some of our Christian brethren on the other side of the Curtain.  
I only know that once upon a time, according to the Biblical record, Peter did not  
go underground.

Peter did not say to the disciple band....."We'll put a diminuendo here now--we'll  
soft-pedal all of this! We won't be seen in public, and I warn  
you--none of you is to preach and teach Jesus Christ openly!"....  
.....no, Peter didn't talk like that.

Back to the public place they went.

If there is to be a witness for Jesus Christ, then there's to be a witness for Jesus Christ anywhere, regardless of the condition or the circumstance.

With all my heart and soul I believe that if this had not been the situation, we would never have had a group of people who would come out and say....

"If only that man's shadow could be cast upon me"

....you would never have had this kind of virtue

....you would never have had this kind of greatness.

When Miss Jensen was here during the week, that most remarkable of all women medical missionaries that I've known, I said to her,

"When you were back in Denmark" (her native land) "did your people tell you anything about Kai Monk?"

Now it was Kai Monk, you see, brilliant young preacher, playwright, dramatist, who Sunday after Sunday when he went to his pulpit during the days of the Nazi occupation, preached and proclaimed God's truth, telling those sturdy Danes to be immovable....

.."Hitler's not your leader. Your leader is Jesus Christ!"

....he spelled it out as boldly and as bluntly as that!

And the Nazis came and said,

"You shut up, Kai Monk! ---None of this preaching!"

They warned him once,

they warned him twice, maybe three times,

....but Kai Monk went on preaching. Giant that he was, he couldn't be quiet.

They found his riddled body one time on a Monday morning, in the gutter.

It might not have happened, my friend, had he gone underground.

He could have gone on living, perhaps, had he agreed. But he would never have been the man, even the man whose dead body cast a vital shadow upon any man who

reads what he preached and tries to understand the kind of life that he lived.

You have to understand this text against the background of that type. Here among these early Christians was a Peter, a giant of a man, and people said,

"If only his shadow could be cast upon us!"

I no longer belittle these people's faith. You can't get me to call it superstition. Rather, I would say they had the kind of faith that was willing to settle for even a momentary shadow, and they would call it good....

....the kind of faith that was willing to settle, just to have the shadow of a good man cast upon them, and this thing itself they would call good.....

...which leads me to say to you---

(--isn't this a parable of all of life? --for the most part, isn't it nothing more than the shadow that we cast as we associate with other people?

We live such a busy life these days.

We either haven't the qualification or the time to enter into depth with our relationship with people.

And for the most part, whatever influence for good that we may have upon people, it may be by the shadows that we cast.

And with all of my heart and soul I believe that God holds us responsible for the shadows that we cast, because this might be the only contact that some people might ever have with us.

The shadows are cast in many ways....I lay my soul bare to you--why shouldn't

I? Some of you have no idea what soul struggle I go through on a

Sunday when I realize that the 18 to 20 minutes that I stand in this pulpit is the only possible contact that I have with some of you

in the course of a week---momentary, passing experience.

...suppose there were no degree of substance in this shadow! )

....it's the wise parent who recognizes, once the teenage years have run their course, and every year and every month of those passing years comes so quickly---that their relationship even with their own children has been something like the passing of a shadow -- it's come---the moment of contact may soon be over.

....what if the shadow would have no substance of lasting value!

...it's the old story of the classroom. It's the good college teacher who says, "I take my work with a sense of dedication. I have them so short a time---momentary in life----let there be something vital in the shadow that I cast."

I once met a man whose shadow was cast across my life at Camp Nawakwa--15 minutes that came and went. And unashamedly I tell you, my life could never again be the same.

If you were to walk into my study at the Parsonage, you would find there on the study desk a Communion case.....he used it when, as he substituted in parishes, he went to take the Communion to the sick and the lonely and the discouraged. From heaven above the shadow of that man is still cast over me. There's always something of the godly temptation to become a better pastor to you when I look at that Communion case.

( I'm mindful of the fact that today in the congregation there are college students here, having come back from a college campus perhaps 150 miles away--the distance isn't important.....some of you are here for the first time since you left for a college campus in September.....

...and I am constrained to remind you of what happened a number of years ago, when a young man left home and went off to a college campus.....

....he had been brought up in a good Christian home, where the sanctity of the Lord's Day was respected and observed.... where the love of the Bible was implanted

in each member of the family.....where there was respect for God.....

..and off to the college campus he went.....

His first contact with a college instructor, who with his new learning pooh-poohed the idea of the Scriptures---God in His relationship to the created world---who made light of the fact that you can personally commit yourself to a personal God.

The student wanted to be a major in the science department....and this was the kind of an instructor to which he was exposed.

He wrote home letters that troubled the minds of his parents, and his parents pleaded with him...."But don't give up going to church, whatever you do."

Episcopalian that he was, he went every Sunday morning to the Communion service.

It didn't mean nearly as much to him on occasion as it did before, but he went.

And then, one Sunday, the head of the science department--the student had never met him....walked down the aisle of that church, and the student observed him.....

....just the way he genuflected

....just the way he prayed

....just the way he knelt to receive the Communion

....just as he came back

He never met the professor formally---the head of the department.....

he never had a direct encounter with him.....

his only relationship was the casting of a shadow.

I say to you.....

.....we move at so rapid a pace

there's so little time to encounter people in depth....

what if our shadows had no meaning!

\* \* \*



December 3, 1961

"The Key Words of Christmas"  
I - "COME"

The sermons during the Sunday mornings in Advent have a central theme; and the theme is "The Key Words of Christmas". Today's word is "COME." The text remains the same for this entire series, the 11th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"And when they were come into the house,  
they saw the young child with Mary his  
mother, and fell down, and worshipped  
him: and when they had opened their  
treasures, they presented unto him gifts;  
gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Christmas has its own vocabulary. There are some words that belong very definitely to the Christmas story. These are the words upon which we ought to meditate Sunday after Sunday as we look forward to the glorious Christmas Eve. The one word that demands our attention even at the very beginning is that very simple word come. You'll notice instantly, as you pass Sunday by Sunday in this series, that each of these words is a verb. Significant enough, God expects us to do something....

...God expects us to be active

...God expects us to hear

...God expects us to respond.

The word 'come' appears in our text because their journey had been completed.... "And when they had come into the house" ...the journey now was over. How long they had been on the journey I cannot tell you. How many hours they had consumed---that's beside the point. The fact remains that the journey was over; and they had eventually come to the end of the way of the wandering star. The dust, the dirt, the disappointment---whatever it may have been that they had along the road, is now over in the face of the great joy which they see in Jesus Christ.

( But the journey, now completed, would never have been ended had it not first been begun. And somewhere along the line there is someone who must have said "Come! Let us get to the road. Come, let us begin." Even the expression that used to be used when a man was about to get onto a train--"All aboard!" is in itself an invitation...."Come! Let's get going!" Who do you suppose used that word 'come'?

With whatever sanctified imagination you've asked God to give you, let it have freedom right now. Try and picture the wise men.  
.....there in the far country---the East.....the revelation has been made.  
..the star was set shining.....they saw it.  
And because they were wise men they began to talk one to another--to raise questions. They were not wont to do foolish things.

...how did they know that they could believe what they  
had seen?

...could they honestly accept this as something other  
than the figment of man's imagination?

...could this portent--could this star be a portent?--  
does it really mean something?

...how long will the journey take? will it be worth it?

...have you any idea what we might find at the end of a  
wandering star?

..so the questions went back and forth, perchance.

And there they remained, until someone, it seems to me, said,

"Well, come. Let us be on our way! Put aside all  
questions now. Let the journey be begun.")

And as I come to this sacred desk on the first Sunday of Advent I'm inclined

to think that when the shepherds heard the angels sing--

...nothing like this had ever occurred before--simple

humble shepherds on the Judean hill....

and once they heard the angels sing they began talking one to another....

"Dare we believe?

"Does God sing a song like that into our hearts?

"Should we believe? should we make the journey?

"Who'll take care of the sheep?

"Dare a man leave his day's work? just because he heard  
an angel sing?....."

...and after they had argued back and forth, then, as with one voice....

"Let us go even now unto Bethlehem and see this thing

which has come to pass.....come!"

That's what that text means...

"Let us go even unto Bethlehem. Come now"

and they said it together.

Who says come? He who initiates the journey...he who says "Let the journey  
begin."

But would you believe me if I were to tell you that, honestly now, I think the  
first one to speak that word 'come' isn't a human being. It's the invitation  
that comes from God Himself. God is the one who always is saying to us "Come".

...God puts the initiative into a man's mind.

...God says, "I dare you to begin."

...God says, "I want you to begin."

What are these precious passages of Scripture:

"Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and  
I will give you rest.....come"

even in the time of Judgment--it is the voice of Jesus Christ, the Judge of the world, who says:

"Come ye blessed of My Father--inherit that which has been prepared for you."

...it is God Himself in Christ who says "Come".

(And as you contemplate anew the meaning of Christmas, you ought to be able to appreciate as you never did before that this is one of the glorious things about the God that we know in Jesus Christ. Only the Christian appreciates to the full God's pleading "Come". In pagan, in superstition, in the other great religions of the world, God frequently is high and lifted up--the unapproachable one---the God who has no traffic with His people---the God who doesn't bend toward them---the God who won't speak with them---the God who doesn't take the initiative to offer them anything....  
...but the God whom we know in Jesus Christ is the God of whom the song-writer once could say, "Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me.....Come! Come home!"

The first word in the vocabulary for Christmas is come.)

...God says, in the song of the angels--it is a song of invitation for you...

"This day in Bethlehem is born---come see!"

...it's the star that was set shining----"follow it---come!"

....it was the wise man who said to the others....."Come!"

The word come means initiate....."let us begin."

The word come is also an invitation--an invitation to somebody else....

"Come let us go together...."

The shepherds said one to another....

"Come now, let us....."

(The journey into Christmas is never a solitary venture. The pictures that we paint of Christmas always include at least one plus someone else. ....

It's the Babe and Mary....

It's Joseph and Mary....

It's not wise man, but wise men....

It is not a shepherd, but shepherds who say one to another,

"Let us go together."

Who could possibly think of Christmas without at least one or more people!  
And the only person who is in the Christmas story who is all by himself is the innkeeper, and we know enough about the story of Christmas to know that he was on the outside. He was never really a part of the true Christmas story.

"Come now, let us go together"....Christmas can't be kept by himself, so a man should say to himself.

God made us that way, by the way. When you and I see something lovely, what's the first thing we're inclined to do?--we turn to the person alongside of us and say "Do you see what I see?" I couldn't possibly keep my reaction to this hymn which was sung by the choir this morning to myself. As soon as I went to the lectern I had to say to you, "It's a perfectly lovely thing, isn't it?" God is always making lovely things available to us. But God never says they're just for you and you alone. That's why we write the letters that we do to someone that we love, once we've seen something...."I wish you could have been here" ....that's why sometimes when we've made a journey--we had to make it for business reasons, perhaps, by ourselves....and we'll never be content until we can take someone that we love on the same trip. We were never made to taste any good thing by ourselves...."Come--let us journey to Bethlehem together." )

Incidentally, are you making up your mind, now, that when you keep Christmas this year you'll be sharing it to the full with as many people as you can? How many people are on your invitation list to the Road to Bethlehem? How many people will you interest in making the trip to the Manger Throne?

I am absolutely amazed when I think of the number of people that I meet in the course of the day, in the course of a year, to whom I've never given any so much as an invitation..."Come along with me--travel the Glory Road to Jesus Christ!"....I assume that they might not be interested. I make up my mind for them, you see, that they have no concern. I think that maybe I'm the only one who is spiritually sensitive. I think when I breathe my last, and when, by the Grace of God, I should stand waiting for the gate of Heaven to open, that next to seeing the face of my Saviour might be the joy that I could know in looking around and seeing the faces of other people who are there because, perchance, by the Grace of God at one time or another in their lives I said to them.....

"Come---let us journey to God together!"

That word come means initiative---get started!

That word come means invite.

As far as the text is concerned, it means journey's end....

"and when they had come...."

It means, having initiated the journey, they started on the road.

There are many temptations that come to us to stop somewhere along the path.

Even the trimmings that go with Christmas could keep us from completing the true Christmas journey. A man could get so caught up with the song that the angels sang that that would be enough for him. Suppose the shepherds would have said, "The angels' song was lovely enough for me!"?

Suppose the wise man would have said, "Why just to see the Star was glory enough!"?

The meaning of Christmas is not a star.

The meaning of Christmas is not a song.

The meaning of Christmas is Jesus Christ. And no one really keeps Christmas until the journey is completed---until having come, you've come all the way.

( I am inclined to think, and you've heard me say it before, that the most precious thing that we could ever hear from the lips of Jesus Christ could be the words, out of His great love....

"I forgive you.....I forgive you"

...but for the moment I am also inclined to think that, extraordinarily precious, is another word that is always coming from His lips....

"Come...."

and you will notice that He says

"Come unto me ....come all the way"

and your journey is never complete

until you've come all the way to Jesus Christ.

This is the first word in the Christmas vocabulary----COME.

Come to Jesus.

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

December 10, 1961

"The Key Words of Christmas"  
II - "SEE"

Today's sermon is the second in a series based upon the general theme, "The Key Words of Christmas." The word for today--SEE. And the text, which remains the same for the entire series, is the 11th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"And when they were come into the house,  
they saw the young child with Mary his  
mother, and fell down, and worshipped  
him: and when they had opened their  
treasures, they presented unto him gifts;  
gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Christmas does have its own vocabulary, and ~~one never~~ might be able to enter into the full meaning of Christmas unless we use the words that belong to the Christmas season. The word today - SEE - is a very significant one, because once they had - - well, why don't I put it to you this way.....  
...suppose you had never heard the Christmas story before--suppose right now it was my holy privilege to tell you how it all occurred...rid your minds, now, will you, as best you can, from all familiarity with the Christmas story....

Once upon a time God put a star in the heaven...

And there were men who looked up and they saw the star,

And they said, "We'll follow this star, no matter where it leads,  
We'll keep following it!"

And they traveled and traveled and traveled, until one night  
they came to the end of the way of a wandering star,

And they found themselves at the entrance to a stable.....

Or, if you want this chapter.....

Once upon a time there were men called shepherds  
watching their flocks by night,



When, in the heavens above, an angel appeared  
And the angel said something to them,  
And when the angel had finished speaking, a choir from  
the heavenly host began to sing,  
And when this was all over, the shepherds reacted this way:  
One of them said to the others,

"Why don't we go to Bethlehem and see for ourselves  
this thing which has been told to us."

So the shepherds decided to leave their flock.  
They journeyed toward Bethlehem.

I don't know how long it took them ~~to get there,~~

but nonetheless they ~~stayed on~~ the road until  
they finally arrived in the very small town.

And because they had received the revelation, they kept  
following until they came to the place, outside,  
where other people were waiting.....

...Now we stop, and we could, depending upon the degree of the sensitivity of  
your soul, be waiting now with bated breath.....

--tell me more! -- what happened?

--when they went inside the house, what did they see?

--Was not this the purpose of the trip? Didn't the

shepherds say to each other "Let's go to Bethlehem and see - -"?

Now, this is the crucial point--what did they see?

There followed, as you well know, the great moment which God had promised  
them - - the very thing for which He had so invitingly encouraged them - - the  
glimpse of the Christ Child! The Biblical account puts it so simply yet so per-

fectly: "And when they were come into the house, they saw the child!"

Seeing something has always been the central part of the Christmas story. God had a terrific desire from the very beginning of the world that men should see Him exactly as He is, that there should be full and complete revelation of God made to the children of men, and toward this end God was forever working. So that one day, perfectly, completely, God could say..."Here! -- look! -- see for yourself -- here I am!"

One day a carpenter's son said to a group of people: "Whoever looks--  
whoever sees me---sees God!"

Now this was the end of all the journey.

The trip was completed because they were able to ~~see~~ Jesus Christ.

To want to see someone,

to want to see something,

has always been a part of the Christmas story.

The shepherds and the wise men completed their journey because they wanted to see.

The older some of us become, the more precious and the more readily we recall Christmas memories from childhood. I can't possibly divorce the element of wanting to see something with the Christmases of my younger years. As a youngster, when Christmas came, I could hardly wait to see what I got...and then the next thing, I could hardly wait to see what my friends and neighbors got. I'd run across the street to Bill's house because I wanted to see what Bill got. And then together we would go to Ellen and Louise's house because we wanted to see what Ellen and Louise got for Christmas.

Wanting to see has always been a part of Christmas....

We look forward to holiday time because we might be able to see our parents....

We look forward to holiday time because maybe the teenager, the young

man from college comes home and we want to see him--  
to see what's happened to him since we last saw him.

To see has always been a part of the Christmas story....

There will be some of you who will live for the very moment when you  
can see the expression on the face of your child when he dis-  
covers that he actually gets what he had hoped that he would  
get.....

And there are some of us who remember with great joy the moment in our  
courtin' years when we discovered on the face of the beloved the  
look of joy and satisfaction when she saw the object of her  
devotion...

To see has always been a part of the Christmas story.

"....and when they entered into the house they saw Jesus Christ."  
The journey completed--this was the end of all their travels.  
....Never, as you well know, in all created time had this occurred before. God  
just wasn't in the habit of showing His face. That's why it was so hard - well-  
nigh impossible--for so many to accept the fact of the Incarnation. It hadn't  
happened before, and for one reason or another as far as they were concerned,  
it seemed to "cheapen" God a bit to have Him come veiled in human flesh. Be  
that as it may--there is no greater moment than the reality of God: to see Him  
face to face.

But did it ever occur to you that before men and women could see God, He  
first gives them a sign. It's a rare thing in the life of God that He suddenly  
reveals Himself. God isn't wont to easily bare His face. For a thousand upon  
thousand years, so it would seem, He was always the "Hidden God" .... the "Un-  
revealed God" ...and that's why it was so hard for some of the people in the  
day of Jesus Christ to accept---because there was something cheap about a God  
that would show His face.

God isn't wont to lay bare His face suddenly, and not always to everyone. That's why sometimes He gives us a warning, to get ready, to prepare us for this moment of reality. Men couldn't stand it, could they, if they ever so quickly came upon God? Perchance that's one reason why some of us ought to get our souls in order lest with little or no warning whatsoever we receive the Great Summons. Chances are that God utilized the time factor to the advantage of the Bethlehem-seekers since each step of the journey could prove a kind of preparation for them ere they arrived at a manger throne. It took a long time for the wise men to get from the East to Bethlehem....

...think you for a single minute that that was an idle period of time in their lives?--why, every ~~step~~ that they took toward Bethlehem was a conversation in which they got ready for the wonderful experience which would be theirs...

....think you for a second that the shepherds, on their way to Bethlehem-town, wasted those moments?...they talked in anticipation of the thing that they might experience once they got there...

even with God, time is always a necessary factor...

...time that people may have to get ready for the thing they're going to see.)

I'm not so sure that any of us could stand sudden exposure to God in His perfection---complete---perfect reality. You remember the story of Browning's archbishop, don't you, who presumably.....?

....Oh, I must tell you they found him dead before the altar---but Browning has him about to make a prayer that presumably went something like this: "O Lord, reveal Thy face to me!".....and undoubtedly that's exactly what God did.

Man couldn't stand the sight of God's face so suddenly. Human as we are, that's one reason why some of us make a prayer...."God, don't let the Great Summons for

me come too soon---at least not without some kind of a warning!" I don't know whether I could be made equal to see your face suddenly--perfectly--completely!"

(You remember reading about the Roman Catholic priest several years ago...  
...who, hospitalized, was told by the surgeon---"It's malignant, all right, and it's incurable."

...the Roman Catholic priest is supposed to have answered, "Thank God!" and the surgeon is supposed to have said, "I thought you'd react like that. Would you mind telling me exactly why?"

...the Roman Catholic priest said, "Well it's this way---I know, and I know that death is coming, and if I wanted you to, you could almost give me the exact time schedule. I'm fortunate in this sense---I can prepare. I want to see Him face to face. From now until then I can get ready."

God is kind enough, sometimes, to give us advance warning, to set a sign. And that's exactly the meaning of the star, and that's exactly the meaning of the appearance of the angels. So God first reveals Himself in signs. Only those who "see" something of Him that way will really see Him eventually.) First there was the sign of the Star. Significantly enough wise men saw it and understood it as the sign of God. But wise men were few in number. An unusual star is something almost everyone could have seen. Perchance they did - - but to them it was only an unusual heavenly display--brilliant beyond description--but only a star. And there, of course, the multitude was wrong. Nothing that God allows is ever to be thought of as "only." It's either a fact in itself or a prelude of something yet to come. God doesn't even waste signs!

....and the wise men and the shepherds would never have seen the Christ Child if they had not been men who were sensitive enough to understand the sign that God was giving....

before the Manger Throne the star...

before the Manger Throne the appearance of the angels.....  
The wise man and shepherds were sensitive enough to say...."This is the sign  
of God!"

There are some people who look around the world and see where God puts  
His initials. The tragedy of life, that there aren't enough people who can see  
the sign that God gives. The star was something so brilliant that the whole  
world could have seen it. But only the wise men looked up and said, "What does  
it mean?---perchance, could it mean God?"

Then there were the shepherds. The appearance of the angel and the an-  
them by the angelic chorus--surely, if they appeared in the heavens others might  
have seen and heard, don't you think? But the record has it that true vision in  
this case belonged only to the humble ones watching their sheep. They alone  
said - - "let's go now and see!" God ~~what~~ their appetite first by the sign in  
the heavens---and they wanted more! They must always be remembered as among  
those who gave meaning to a sign that had God's initials!

An angel appearing from the heavens---that doesn't mean within ten feet  
from where you are---the heavens mean far removed. Many people should have seen  
the angel---many people should have heard the song. But only the shepherds were  
sensitive enough to say...."Could this music mean God? Could this apparition be  
a sign to us?" God has a way of giving signs. And only until you see the sign  
might you be able to follow enough to be confronted by Him in reality.

Another ~~needs to be~~ mentioned. The innkeeper who said he had no room.  
We have no record whatsoever that he ever so much as gave any concern for the  
Babe---surely, he did not see Him nor any sign that would spell GOD.

( And this is the tragedy for most of us. We do not see God's signs. It  
isn't that He doesn't make them plain and clear. A star and a song from Heaven  
are just about as vivid and attention-attractive as they come.

I am willing to believe that this seething unrest which is a part of today's world is something which God is allowing, that perchance you and I might be able to say "God's in this thing!" I think I could build a case for it, not that I would want to use this pulpit as a source of argumentation in your behalf, or to argue with you, but I think I can be sympathetic to those who say that God allows Communism and godless Russia to create a degree of unrest in the world....and perchance those of us in the complacent West might be disturbed to the extent that through the meaning of history we might be able to spell GOD.

I recently brought to the desk in my study a stack of books dealing with Africa. I want to make it as a part of my business to read, that I might better understand this seething unrest--that giant which is no longer asleep. Who knows? perchance that even in the unrest which Africa, history might be spelling out fully the letters GOD.)

Paul Scherer once preached a sermon entitled "One Soul's Epic." It was an excellent treatment of the healing of the blind beggar Bartimaeus. Scherer tells--as only a prince of a preacher could tell, how the poor benighted blind man heard all the shouting and confusion going on as the procession attended Jesus through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. Not being able to see, he used what senses he had left--he heard....a multitude of people going by...a procession following Jesus Christ.....and Bartimaeus in his ignorance and darkness cries out---"What does this mean?"

The disciple says, "Jesus Christ.....Jesus Christ."

Bartimaeus cries out, "Jesus Christ, have mercy on me! You who caused this disturbance---you, the one the people are following, looking for something---stop where you are, Jesus Christ, and pay attention to me! .....Give me a blessing!"

It was a restlessness that came to this town and in his ignorance and darkness, he asked what it all meant. For him even a moving, teeming mass of people couldn't be meaningless. It had to be a sign of something! And eventually he was able to cry out GOD in the face of it all: Jesus Christ in the excitement of life's busyness. For him it became a sign of Hope - - immediate help - - and he latched on to it.

(Again, I say, this is the tragedy for most of us--we may see the unusual, unexpected, the tortuous, and the burdensome--the uneasy and the unpleasant--but so few of us see any of these as the sign of God. God is always giving us signs. Some people read it in unrest....some people read it in turmoil...some people read it in bitter frustration and failure....~~some~~ people read it in anxiety and neurosis. Among the things that I cherish, as I've told you before, as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, is to try to show myself a friend, a Pastor to my people. And every now and then you give me the opportunity to walk with you--to walk with you as you carry your burden, a burden of doubt, a burden of disappointment, a burden of defeat, perhaps.

And I've reached the point in my ministry where I think I can understand exactly what C. S. Jung, one of the world's most renowned psychologists, has to say. Paul Scherer asks in that sermon, just before he quotes C. S. Jung, "Is there anything the human soul, sitting there by the side of the road, in its ears all the noises that are abroad and mean God - - is there anything the human soul needs more poignantly than that?" C. S. Jung, in his recent book, "Modern Man in Search of a Soul" - - says toward the end: "Among all my patients in the second half of life--that is to say over 35--there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost it (to see God) and none of them has been really healed who did not regain it."



And with this renowned psychologist, after 21 years in the ministry, I can give an unqualified assent--that even in your own deep-seated personal emotional problem there could be an unsettlement, and if you put all the letters together, once they had been scrambled, the ultimate GOD.

And so the shepherds and the wise men came to Bethlehem, and they were the ones who saw the star, they were the ones who followed it.....and because they did see the sign and not ignore it, they were able to confront Jesus Christ face to face. Now this is the ultimate meaning of Christmas. This is journey's end----to see Jesus Christ---to see Him perfectly and completely...

not to see the star and to settle for it.....

not to hear the angels' song and say, "This is it"....

not to see the stable and say, "This, too, is it".....

....but to see Jesus Christ.

And you remember, let me say it again...once upon a time there was a carpenter's Son who said: "Whoever sees Me sees God." You don't have to look any farther. How fortunate we Christians are! We have seen the best, the finest, and the most complete revelation of God. Isn't this what God is always saying--He who in a certain sense is the great Attention-getter...."Come--I want you to look at Me--to see Me as I am!"....

....and you've never really seen God until you've beheld the face of Jesus Christ.

(Let me close by reminding you of something that perchance you recall very readily. A theatrical production was about to be staged at Christmas-time, and those in charge of production said, "Now let everybody understand, the thing that we're trying to do in this production is to build up to the point where in the manger scene everything else is completely blacked out...and then we have one

very soft light being focused upon the face of Jesus Christ. So we're going to interpret for people the centrality of the meaning of Christmas." ~~Whatever led up to that point seemed to be impertinent to this moment.~~

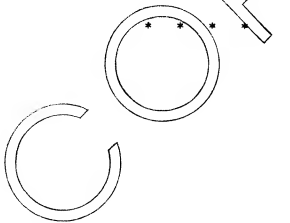
~~But~~ The night of the production came. The fellow who was working the switchboard forgot...and all the lights went out, and the theater was in complete darkness. And something in more than a stage whisper was heard...."Hey, you! --- ~~not all the lights;~~--- you switched off Jesus!"

The purpose of Christmas is to bring God into full view. )

And when He couldn't get people to see Him in any way, He came in the form of a Babe. Could it be that no one yet, with any degree of sensibility or sensitivity, has ever ignored the cry of a child?.....so great is God's desire to have people pay Him attention.....

"Come.....

SEE....."



(This sermon transcribed as recorded, except that additional notes have been inserted which were not included, verbatim, in the sermon as delivered. In some instances where this makes for repetition, the fault lies with the secretary who was unwilling to edit either the sermon or the notes, that none of the thoughts might be lost.)\*

December 17, 1961

"The Key Words of Christmas"  
III - "WORSHIP"

Today's sermon is the next to the last in the series based upon the general theme, "The Key Words of Christmas." The word we shall consider now is the word WORSHIP. The text remains the same for the entire series. It is the 11th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Of the four words which constitute for our series the key words of Christmas, I am inclined to think that none of them is more precious than the word that we consider right now; and if I were asked to cast a vote for the most significant of the four words, I would be likely to think that the word worship could be the most significant. For man is never at his best until he enjoys a worship experience. Man is never so tall--never rising to his full stature, if you please, until he is constrained to kneel....to kneel in the presence of his maker....to adore the Eternal God....to worship Him as his Saviour.

In the Presbyterian church the Westminster Catechism is used. The first question in the catechism is this:

What is the chief end of man?

And the answer, as every Presbyterian knows, is

To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

To this end was man born--that he might recognize God and that he might adore the Saviour--that he might bring Him true homage.

It is a significant thing that the very first thing that happened on the part of any people who came from the outside to visit Jesus Christ was an act of worship....

"...and when they entered the house and they saw the child with Mary his mother, they fell down and worshiped.".....

before they so much as gave Him anything.....

before they so much as said anything.....

....they were constrained to kneel.

If one wanted to, he could allow himself a mild shock.

...am I reading correctly?

...is this true, that there was a worship service in a stable?

...where was the altar, please?

...where was the aisle that the choir used? --where did they sit?

...do you mean to tell me that here, in a stable, where you walked around on straw, where animals were on every side, where you felt the heat of the animals themselves ---

---that you could have a worship experience?

Significantly enough, that is where the pure act of homage to Jesus Christ first took place! And the first observation that comes to us when we consider this word worship is the recognition that wherever men seek Jesus Christ, and He is found, that ground becomes holy ground...Wherever men seek Him, and wherever they find Him, this is holy ground.

( I would never want to become pastor of a congregation whose people did not have a sense of reverence. I would find it a very difficult thing to become pastor of a congregation whose people had no care and respect for God's House---who didn't want it to become the loveliest, the most beautiful--to have the finest appointments of any building in the community. As long as God would give me my faculties, I would want to encourage people to keep their church a place of beauty and refinement.....and as God would give me the privilege, I would want to lead them into the very presence of God when they came to worship...and I would use whatever things by way of brick, mortar, stone, that would be necessary to remind them that this is holy ground---that here it could be made easy for them to worship.....

....And I would never want to become pastor of any congregation who would foolishly permit themselves to believe that in such a setting, and in such a setting alone, Jesus Christ could be found. It is right and proper that here amid ecclesiastical setting it would be made easy for us to walk into the presence of God, with this, only for the simple reason that when we go beyond these doors we should be made more sensitive to the reality of His presence anywhere and everywhere.)

Now that leads us to accept the fact that in the manger, as bare as any place could be of an ecclesiastical setting, a true worship experience took place. It took place because here in this setting were the two components that make any worship experience valid.....

People who come seeking God, and  
people who, when they find Him, are constrained to kneel,  
and to worship.

I sing the praise of that person who went into the Chapel of the Grateful Heart for the first time....and as the person came out, was heard to say, "I am

so glad we have kneelers in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart because when I kneel I feel as though I'm nearer to God." Now, mark you, the person did not say--"I believe God hears my prayers better".....but there is something about this person, when the person thought about God, the person was constrained to kneel, and felt God nearer. Man never rises to his full stature until he kneels ...and he's never nearer to God than when he kneels.

( When you visit the Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen, the guide who is on the cathedral staff will tell you very proudly that the church has been blessed with the statuary, the ~~scripture~~ work, of Thorvaldsen, the famous Danish sculptor. And as you walk the center aisle you'll find in the niches of the church, on either ~~side~~ wall, in about the same size as these openings here for our windows, heroic-size statues of the apostles, excellently done. Those of you who have been there recall it readily.

...and as you walk the aisle you can almost look into the face of each apostle--directly....a kind of a man-to-man approach---something that makes you say, "You, too, were a human being, and so am I."....

....and then as you walk steadily and reverently toward the altar, your guide might whisper to you, "And now you come to Thorvaldsen's crowning glory-- --this is his CHRISTUS....."

....and there is the heroic-size statue of Jesus Christ, His head is lowered a bit, and His hands outstretched invitingly, and these words, "Come Unto Me"....

...but your guide will whisper reverently--"If you want to really see His face, may I suggest that you kneel--"

This is a necessary component in the worship experience. One never really sees the face of God until he kneels, figuratively speaking, if you wish; literally, if you prefer it. )

Now all of this took place, let me remind you, at the very beginning, in a stable, a place completely stripped and made bare of all the ecclesiastical setting. But the two essentials were present:

--people who came seeking Jesus Christ

--and when they found Him, they were constrained to kneel

and this became the first act of worship.

(In the small town in which I grew up there was a livery stable. Like all the other youngsters in the community, we were quite excited whenever a new shipment of horses came---how we'd run down to the railroad track to see the men unload; and every now and then there would be a runaway horse, and how excited we'd become! The years passed. There was no longer the need for horses in that community as there was at one time. The stable, as a stable, went out of business. It remained idle, vacant.....until one day the Roman Catholic Church came along, and decided to form a parish in that little town. They needed a building. The only building available---the town stable....a stable perhaps three-quarters the size of this Nave.

....they arranged for the purchase. The news spread quickly---

"PUSHER-WEAVER STABLE SOLD FOR A CHURCH"

--who ever heard of such a thing! --a church in a stable!

Ah, beloved, who should ~~never~~ have heard of such a thing? Because that's where the first church service was held--in a stable....

....that's where the first act of worship for Jesus Christ took place!

This was one time in my life when I think I might like to have been a Roman Catholic. I'd like to have been a member of that constituting parish, at the moment, especially, when they went to decide upon a name. And whatever pressure I could

have brought upon the priest and the bishop, I think I would have brought it as strongly as I could...and I would have said, "There is only one name for this parish---let us call the church "The Church of the Holy Manger." I have never known a church to be called by that name.)

(What is a congregation but a group of people who come together to worship Jesus Christ---that's the point at which they first come together. When I became the pastor of this congregation, I took it upon myself to recognize the areas of my responsibility....and none would I guard with more zealous concern than the fact that I am given responsibility to guide and direct the worship services of this congregation. How many of the Councilmen notice it, I don't know, but here again, not to be classified as anything insignificant, the first real committee report, the first item of business that we consider every time Council meets, when it comes time for the listing of the reports from the committees, we begin invariably, so it seems recently, and properly so--- --with the Committee on Worship.....for this is the main concern of the Christian Church. This is man's chief end - - to worship God.)

( I had a dream the other night, a dream in which it seemed to me God was sending a messenger from heaven to earth.

And He said to His messenger,

"Bring me back a report--describe man for me

---man in the 20th century. What's he like?

How does he seem to you?"

God the Creator, God our Heavenly Father--sending an angel down to get a report of what you and I are like.

Naturally he gets the composite picture. And back the angel goes...

"Heavenly Father, this is what I found.

I found man. I brought you a series of candid camera shots.



Here, look! --this one....quite typical, I dare say.

He's shaking his fist---he's flexing his muscles....the whole international scene is the background for this kind of thing. Everyone seems to be doing it. One can hear the rattling of sabers everywhere....and what is this but man shaking his fist? Big nations do it...little nations do it...tiny islands do it. This is man.

Here's another candid camera shot, Heavenly Father....

I had to have a rapid lens in order to get this one! It's a picture of man in flight--he can fly!...faster than any bird! He can swim swifter than any fish!...and now he has been going into orbit!

This is man."

And God waits.

"Have you no other picture?

..man shaking his fist! ..man running! ..man flying! ..man inventing!

--I was hoping that somewhere you might have in your series of candid-camera shots someone kneeling---someone falling prostrate before an altar----someone humbling himself and whispering the name 'GOD' ....

'Thee we adore....

Thee we love

Thee we would serve' ....."

....I'm not so sure that this is a picture of 20th century man. Of all that he's able to do, seldom enough will you find him kneeling. This is the pathetic thing, for man is never at his best, man is never as God intended him, until he knows what it is to kneel.....to worship.)

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(This sermon transcribed as delivered)

December 24, 1961

"THE KEY WORDS OF CHRISTMAS"  
IV - "OFFER"

This morning's sermon is the last in the series for Advent on the general theme, "The Key Words of Christmas." The word for today is "Offer"; and the text, which has remained the same for the series, ought to be very familiar to you by this time, the 11th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"And when they were come into the house,  
they saw the young child with Mary his  
mother, and fell down, and worshipped  
him: and when they had opened their  
treasures, they presented unto him  
gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

( Presumably, you've finished your Christmas shopping. In all likelihood, the last gift has already been wrapped. Within twenty-four hours from now it could be that you will have already opened a gift that bears your name. Tell me now, honestly, or rather, answer yourself honestly--which will bring you the greater joy, the gifts that you purchase for someone else, or the gift that you will receive? Which means most to you at Christmastime--giving or getting? It's a question that deserves to be asked, for while it is true that both are part of the Christmas story....

..you can't think of Christmas without giving....

..you ought not to be able to think about Christmas without getting....

....but which of the two brings you the greater joy?)

...It is a wise man who once said that it's not a bad test of character to ask a man to answer the question, for is the Scripture right when the Scripture says,

"It is more blessed to give than to receive"? Whatever you think of Christmas, you consider both aspects of the story---giving and getting. In the final analysis, the key word for Christmas is John 3:16---for of all the passages of the Bible that you might forget, please hold on to this one, for this is the Gospel in one verse...this gives us the unforgettable picture of God...this is the meaning of Christmas.....

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son....."

....God is the Great Giver, and Christmas spells it out so perfectly and so completely.

But did it ever occur to you that there is the other side of the coin. God not only is the Great Giver----God also waits to receive. And what do men offer Him?

The story of Christmas is the story of men and women who come--come to Jesus Christ, and bring Him something....

....the wise men offered him their sanctified curiosity---

"We shall come to him in order that we might see--"

....the shepherds came, and they brought to him their homage

....Mary, at Christmastime, offered God her heart as a cradle

....Joseph, at Christmastime, promised God undying faithfulness, devotion, to Mary, his betrothed....

You can't think of Christmas without people giving or getting.

Now the fact remains that God also waits to receive. God, whose hand outstretched is never empty, also waits to see if, when you come into His presence, you come empty-handed. No man, I say to you, ought ever to be ushered into the presence of God empty-handed.

( To bring something to God, you say? What does God need?

Doesn't God have everything?

Isn't it the Psalmist who says, "The earth is the Lord's and the  
fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein."?

Bring something to God?--He who has everything?

Ah, but you speak too easily, my friend, you speak too glibly. Your words are  
cheap. God doesn't have everything. I know. Down deep inside of my heart  
there's a certain portion that's stubborn, and I'm not so sure God always has  
all of my heart. There are times when there are some things that I want more  
than I want God. There are times when there are some things I would rather do  
than do the things that please Him. No....God doesn't have everything. He  
doesn't always have all of my heart.

In these almost six years that I've soent in Saint Luke Church, I have come to  
know you well enough, that with complete candor I can say He doesn't have all of  
your heart, either. Sometimes you seem to indicate He does, but not always.  
God doesn't have everything.

God is the Great Giver...but on the other hand, God remains the Perpetual Beggar..

...pleading for you and for me

...always asking more of your devotion

one more evidence of your undying allegiance

one more good deed....one more kind word

He doesn't have everything.

When you think of the Christmas story, and each of these words that  
we've considered Sunday by Sunday, it's the story of men who came from afar...

and when they came to Bethlehem they saw the young child....

they knelt down, they worshipped, they had a church service all  
of their own.....

...but suppose the story would have ended at  
that point? Suppose this was all that you and I would ever have known about the

first Christmas?....

wise men following a wandering star....

shepherds giving attention to an invitation that came from  
the angels, arriving in a little town, going back to  
the stable...

getting down on their knees, making a prayer, perchance

.....and suppose the story ended there!

Wouldn't you and I cry out - - "More! Surely this isn't the end!

Isn't there another chapter that must be  
written? Do people simply come and behold  
the face of Christ--~~breathe~~ a prayer--get  
up and go home? Is there no other chapter?"...

That's why this word "offer" has to appear. Man does respond. No man can  
be a part of any experience, no matter how significant it is, without offering  
something of himself in return. That's why the story is as glorious for you and  
for me as it is!

"When they were come into the house they saw the young  
child with Mary his mother..."

wonderfull we say,

"and fell down and worshipped him...."

this is good!

....but no joy is like the joy that comes to our hearts when we read,

"they opened their treasures and offered him their  
gifts, gold and frankincense, and myrrh."

I say to you again, no experience that you and I ever know can really be called  
a valid one unless it claims something of ourselves in return---until we offer  
something ere we leave. I like to think every time you and I come to worship in  
this holy place, something of your soul remains, ere you leave this holy place.

It was properly done, last Sunday, and beautifully so, when our choir sang as their anthem the words that began with the question, "What can I give him--?" What can I offer to Jesus Christ? Do you remember the entire poem:

"What can I give him, Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give him - - Give my heart."

...and this is the thing that Jesus Christ wants most - - my heart.

The text can stand careful reading. One ought not to underestimate the significance of the words "and when they opened their treasures, they offered him their gifts". This part of the text tells us two things - -

tells something about them

and tells us what they thought about Jesus Christ

It was from their treasures that they presented their gifts.... It is out of the best that they had that they offered something to Jesus Christ. Each of us, I suppose, desires certain things for his own soul. Please let me tell you this, one of the things that I would want most for myself is that I would show myself always a grateful person; but I frankly confess, every now and then I am perturbed when someone gives me something, and I say thank you to the person, and the person says, "Oh, think nothing of it--it's nothing! It really didn't cost me anything! I shan't miss it at all!" The gift begins to lose its halo. Not that I'm not grateful for anything, but the gift that always means something very, very special is the gift that costs someone something.....

"....out of their treasures, they brought their gifts to Jesus Christ...."

Don't misunderstand me, but if I could see your gift list, I think I would know something of your basic character. A man is known by the thing he gives. And by the same token, if I could stand by your side while you opened the gifts underneath the Christmas tree that bear your name, I think I could tell something

about your basic character as a receiver of gifts, for we have a way of showing what we think of people by what we give them.

During my college years I used to spend my summer vacations, for the most part, with my father. An Oriental rug merchant, a dealer in linens, he covered much of Central Pennsylvania. I was impressed by a number of things. One was the way these people, his clientele, took him into their hearts and into their homes. And many of the people with whom I visited when I went with him were the second generation--it was their parents who had befriended my father when he came as an immigrant from the Old Country, was no more than a teenager. A kind of mutual respect developed, they had taken him to their hearts.

Even though they were depression years, I remember how, on occasion, he would refuse to make a sale, lest in later months they might regret the purchase that they made. But I was never so certain of his insight into human nature as once when a woman was about to buy something to make as a gift to a friend. My father knew both of them, the woman about to make the purchase, and the person to whom the gift was to be sent. And my father very candidly said, "I don't think you ought to buy this, because it really doesn't represent you, and I am certain it doesn't represent her."

There's something to be said, you see, by finding the tell-tale characteristic in the gift upon which we decide, and the person who is meant to receive the gift.....

"and they opened their treasures...."

..the best that they had they offered as a gift

fit for a King. Is Jesus Christ on your Christmas list?

And what is the nature of the gift you will bring to

Him?

It has been established that when Lord Nelson, brilliant British warrior

that he was, would receive the vanquished representative, he would offer him friendship and treat him as graciously as possible. But word got around. Once upon a time there was brought to his quarter-deck a representative of the nation that he had conquered. This man had heard about Nelson's generosity, his gracious spirit.....and he went walking toward Nelson with his hand outstretched. Nelson kept his hand at his side. And as the man came toward him, Nelson said, "Your sword first, and then your hand.".....

....for the simple reason that Jesus Christ wants us to submit  
to Him

Jesus Christ wants us to surrender to Him

...once we offer Him our hearts, then we can walk  
with Him in love.

I'm not so sure that I know what you want most this Christmas,

I'm not so sure that I know.

But I'm reasonably certain that I know what God wants most---

--your heart. It's the most precious thing you have to give.

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"JOURNEY WITH A PURPOSE"

The sermon bears the title, "Journey With A Purpose" and the text is the 15th verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"...the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger."

No one ever keeps Christmas casually. No one accidentally comes upon the Christmas spirit. He only keeps Christmas who decides to keep it. For Christmas is a journey, a journey into the very heart of God. And before the journey is completed, even before the first step is taken, man must decide to make the trip.

You can't possibly think of Christmas without thinking of a journey. For some of you here tonight, this is your first Christmas home after having gone away to a college campus last September. And chances are that for a number of you, you have been thinking about Christmas and the trip back home.....

Some of you, when you think of Christmas, remember other years---your first furlough--and the thing you wanted most was to be home for Christmas.....

The news today, the news last evening---one account after another of people being stranded in the mid-west.....

People on a journey.....on the road.....

having decided to get home for Christmas.

The first Christmas was a great journey. It was no small thing for Mary and Joseph to travel the 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The first Christmas is the story of a journey.....

It is a mighty significant trek that the wise men took from the Far East. The first Christmas is the story of a journey. The journey, if you please, from outer space to earth---DIVINE INVASION.....God coming

from heaven to earth---God having decided to make the journey.

A number of years ago, highly popular, was the story of Green Pastures, the inspired Negro interpretation of God and His troubled concern for the world. And as He looked upon it from heaven above, He knew great anguish of spirit, for man had turned out to be the rebel---man the great sinner. And God from heaven above looks down on earth, and the archangel says to Him, "What will you do?" ....and God, rising to His full stature, holding Himself erectly as only God can hold Himself erectly, says to the archangel...

"I've made up my mind I am going on a journey."

....You can't possibly think of the first Christmas without thinking of a journey, a journey that was accomplished because somewhere the decision was made---the decision was made to undertake the journey.

Beloved, on this Holy Night I ask you---have you made a decision to go to Bethlehem?

..Ah, you've made the decision to go to the house of your friend....

..you made the decision to go shopping....

..you made the decision to go to your pantry--to get all the foodstuffs made ready....

..and God be thanked, you've made the decision to come here to this place tonight.....

but have you made the decision to go all the way to Bethlehem?

have you made the decision that somehow, this Christmas, you'll take the pilgrimage of the spirit that will lead you to the very heart of God?

....it can't possibly happen unless the decision is first made.

The text falls easily into certain portions:

"and the shepherds said one to another, let us now go even unto Bethlehem...."

....they made up their minds. They would never have arrived, had not somewhere, somehow, the decision been made.

What is the journey, my friend, in which you're engaged this Christmastime? Is it on the road to Bethlehem, and will it be a journey with a purpose?

The shepherds said one to another, let us go to Bethlehem.....

..no man can ever accomplish anything exceedingly wonderful by himself. That's why organizations count on team leadership...

that's why some people get married---they know very well that they can never rise to their finest and best without the inspiration of the one who loves them, without the companion to walk by their side, and even if in the plan of God the companion should be removed from the earthly pilgrimage, yet there remains the inspiration of a noble and a good life which has become part of another man's life....

no great and wonderful journey has ever been undertaken as a solitary journey....

no experience, no matter how extraordinary you may wish to claim it, has ever been consummated without the prayers, the companionship, the partnership, of someone else.

This journey that you make into Christmas---how many other people are part of your picture?

how many people are with you on the road to Bethlehem that leads to the very heart of God?

No man can keep Christmas to himself....

No man walks the Christmas road alone....

Must I remind you, that whenever you think of that first Christmas, you think always of one and more people, never less than one

....Mary and Joseph

....shepherds

...not wise man, wise men

and the only person who appears alone in the Christmas story is either Herod or the innkeeper, and they have remained forever outside the circle of the real Christmas story.

He who takes the journey into Christmas--

he who takes the journey into the heart of God, never travels by himself...

"and the shepherds said one to another, let us..--together--

"go to Bethlehem and see this thing which is to come to pass."

It was, I say to you, a journey with a purpose.

They did not wander---they did not travel aimlessly.

At every step in the journey the wise men could have been asked, "Quo vadis, my friend? Whither bound?"

and every single time they could have answered,

"We are following a star. Our purpose is to remain good pilgrims until we shall arrive. God has spoken to us."

Shepherds on their way to Bethlehem---they journeyed with haste.

It's an unusual thing to see anyone in the Near East in a hurry. They just don't travel that way. They just don't live that way. This in itself was spectacular.

And surely there must have been people who would have said,

"Why do you move so hurriedly? Where are you going?"

and think you not for a single minute that every time they were able to say,

"We've received divine inspiration...

we've heard the angels sing....

we're on this journey because we are motivated by God!"

You and I are pilgrims of the WAY. Life has been pictured in many ways; and perhaps the most popular of all pictures for life is that it's a journey. Should

someone stop you, my friend, and say,

"What is your destination?"

....fortunate indeed is any man who can say,

"Heaven is my destination! I hope some day to see my Maker

face to face! I am on my way through life to heaven above!"

This is no small matter, I submit to you tonight---this is written into the liturgy of the church, every Sunday that we come together---"that the Grace of God should keep us unto life everlasting"

Christians are unique in this way. They know their destination.

Christians are unique in this respect---that of all the people on the face of the earth, once they have set their face toward heaven, and once they have determined that with everything that they possess they shall stick to the road

....they know exactly that they will arrive.

We have no accounting anywhere that any of the wise men failed to appear in Bethlehem.....

we have no accounting anywhere that any of the shepherds failed to complete the journey.....

there ~~was~~ a journey with a purpose. They had decided to make it, and they determined to stay on the road until they reached their destination. Maybe on occasion they must have said to themselves, "How far is it?"

....have you ever asked yourself the question, how far it is to Bethlehem?

"It isn't far to Bethlehem-town,  
It's anywhere that Christ comes down  
And finds in people's friendly face  
A welcome and abiding-place.  
The road to Bethlehem runs right through  
The homes of folks like me and you."

...but the sad thing is, it's only a step away, and some folks have never arrived, because they never decide to make the journey into the very heart of God.

This is the meaning of Christmas, my friend---journey with a purpose.

...God journeying from heaven to earth to find the Bethlehem in the  
hill country of your soul.

This is the meaning of Christmas---you, right now,

in the quiet of this holy place,

hushing your soul and saying,

"Come into my heart, Lord Jesus,

come in, right now."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)